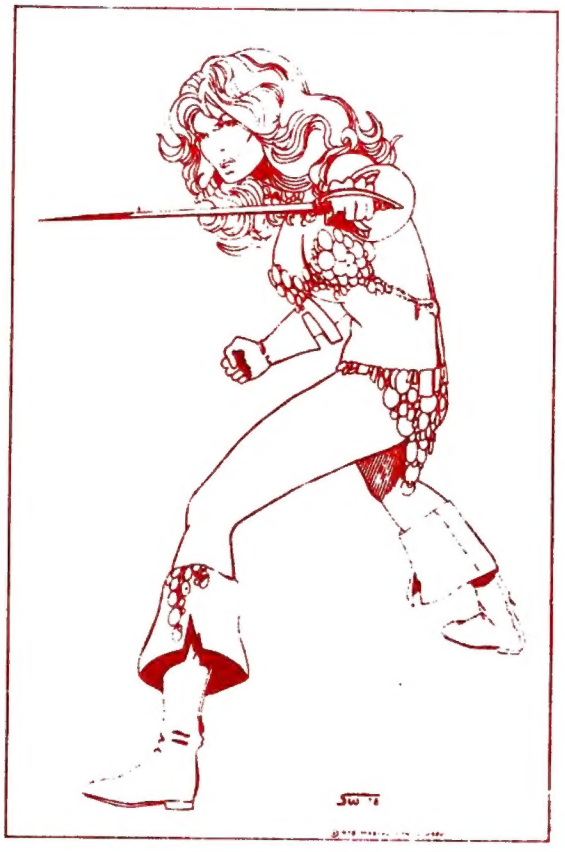
# BEM-IA

## THE COMICS NEWS FANZINE

## JUNE 20p



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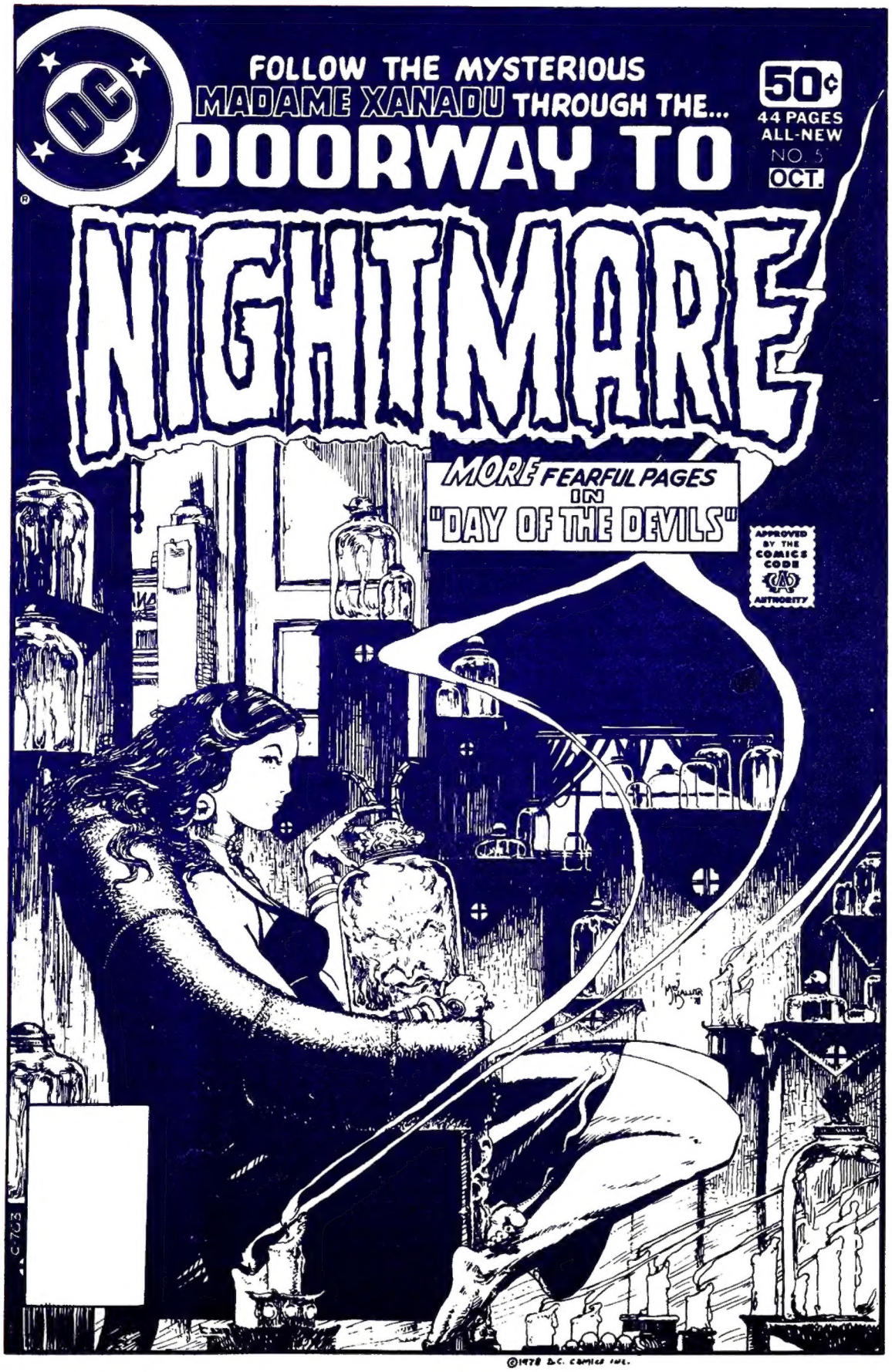


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BEM-19 June 1978

incorporating Fantasy Trader

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# news

Marvel have reinstated cover dates, after a gap of 4 months --the scheme to increase time on display wasn't successful.

The Marvel colour magazine line is expanding; SATANA is a completely new version of the character, by Gerber, Colan & DeZuniga--the back-up will be LILITH, by Gerber & Colan. An adaptation of the new film THE SHINING is also planned, and may well be a colour magazine; MAN-THING and HODIAH TWIST (a Vampire Tales alumnus) should also show up soon.

MARVEL PREVIEW is switching to the colour magazine format after an issue featuring two detective stories, one written by Don McGregor and the other, a visual novel, by Max Allan Collins & Howie Chaykin. The first issue in process-colour (like the Conan issue of MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL) will feature a new 61-page WEIRDWORLD tale by Doug Moench & Mike Golden, with inks by perhaps Alex Nino; a short back-up has been drawn by Walt Simonson. Following is a western-themed issue by Doug Moench & Paul Gulacy, plus a new story by Stan Lynde, who used to draw a syndicated wild west strip "Rick O'Shay".

An SF colour magazine, with STARLORD by Chris Claremont & Carmine Infantino, is also in preparation. The back-up in RAMPAGING HULK ≠10, the first colour issue, will be "Moon Knight", by Doug Moench & Gene Colan.

Simon & Shuster are doing a book of reprints from SPIDEY SUPER STORIES.

Other special projects from Rick Marschall's division are a magazine based on the new TV show EARTH STAR, previously known as "Galactica", and also SHAUN CASSIDY in a book of his own. Other TV, book and film adaptations, plus further rock star-featuring magazines, are also in the works. The colour magazine format can include fold-out pages, where these are appropriate.

CONAN ≠100 will be a 60 cent 48 page issue.

In the standard 35c format, a regular WEIRDWORLD comic is planned to follow the PREVIEW issue. THE MICRONAUTS is a new title, to tie in with the Mego Toys creations, to be scripted by Bill Mantlo, and drawn by Mike Golden; SHOGUN WARRIORS by Doug Moench & Herb Trimpe is also in the wings.

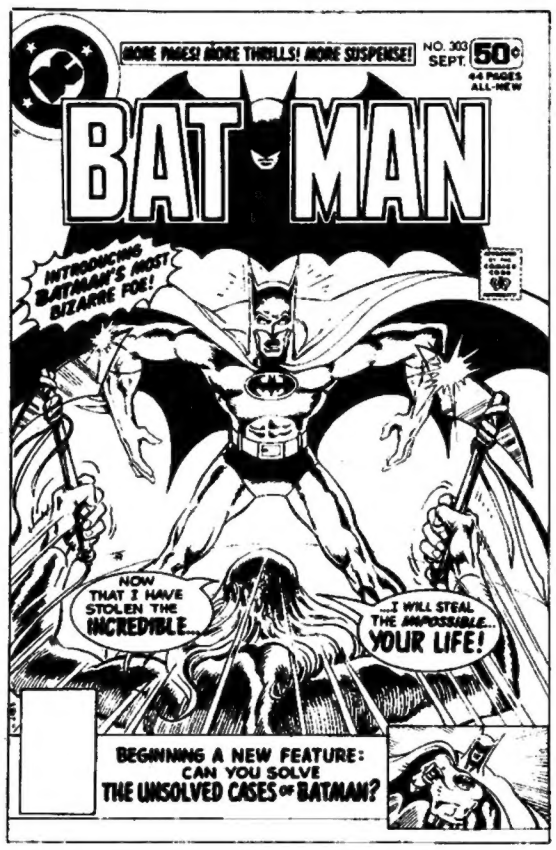
MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE ≠50 will be "Thing vs Thing", written & illustrated by John Byrne; other artists on the book are Bob Hall, Frank Miller & Jim Craig, while Mark Gruenwald is writing a 3-parter featuring the coming of "HER" (remember "Him"?), with Benjy's guest-stars Starhawk, Moon Dragon, and the High Evolutionary.

After Roy Thomas gives up editorship of WHAT IF, Mark Gruenwald and Jim Shooter are producing "What If Not Brand Echh Were Published Today", starring "the New Echhs Men" by Stern & Byrne; "What If Dr Strange Had Become A Disciple of Dormammu"; & "What If Thor Had Defied Odin" (when he said no to Jane Foster).

The THOR ANNUAL co-features the Eternals, by Roy Thomas, Walt Simonson & Klaus Janson.

Coming in MARVEL PREMIERE: JACK OF HEARTS by Bill Mantlo & Keith Giffen; a 2-part origin of a new ANT-MAN by Michelinie & Byrne; the origin of a new GIANT-MAN by Ed Hannigan & Bob Budiansky; a NIGHTCRAWLER tale by Mary Jo Duffy, Dave Cockrum & Bob Layton; and CALEB HAMMER, Marvel's answer to Jonah Hex.

Marvel and DePatie-Freleng are producing a new FANTASTIC FOUR cartoon show; Stan Lee is writer/producer, and Jack Kirby is doing the storyboards.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HOW CAN THE BOY OF STEEL WIN-- UNDER A WEAKENING RED SUN?

ART CREDITS:
Brian Bonhomme: 16 (pencils); Dave Byrom: 13 (lower), FT pages 2 & 3; Martin Dutton: 9; Phil Elliott: 7, 18 (top left); Dave Hornsby: 18 (lower); Alan Hunter: 5; Black Jimmy Marshall: 11; Mike Matthews: 8, 14 (left), 15, 19; Harry McAvinchey: 14 (top); Terry Moore: 12 (strip), 20 (lower); Nick Neocleous: 13 (upper); Russ Nicholson: 18 (top right); Luke Rainford: 10, 17; Pete Scott: 20 (upper), Fantasy Trader cover; Superswipe: 1; Bob Watkins: 16 (inks).

BEM is published 5 times a year

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Ross Andru's editorial assignments have been announced. He's taking over FLASH with #270 and DC COMICS PRESENTS with #5, both from Julie Schwartz; ALL STAR COMICS with #77 from Joe Orlando; WARLORD with #16 from Larry Hama; and the new ARMY AT WAR with #3, along with SECRETS OF HAUNTED HOUSE with #17, both from Paul Levitz.

AQUAMAN is cancelled with #63, MISTER MIRACLE with #25, and SHADE with #9. The Steve Ditko ODD MAN back-up strip, which begins in that issue, transfers to BLACK LIGHTNING with #14, replacing THE RAY. A new home for MANHUNTER FROM MARS, who was scheduled to go into AQUAMAN, is ADVENTURE

THE WORLD'S GREATEST SUPERHEROES IN A FANTASTIC FULL-LENGTH NOVEL!
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JUSTICE LEAGUE of AMERICA
HERE COMES THE INJUSTICE GANG-- AND BECAUSE OF YOU, ULTRAA, WE'RE POWERLESS!
THEN I'LL HAVE TO BEAT THEM ALL-- SINGLE-HANDED!

COMICS--it will follow the new METAL MEN tryout, and, depending on reaction to the first three instalments, may become part of the dollar book's permanent line-up.

The tabloid THE BEST OF DC, VOLUME II will be out in August, containing HAWKMAN by Fox & Kubert from BRAVE & BOLD #42, JONAH HEX by Albano & DeZuniga from ALL STAR (later WEIRD) WESTERN #11, SUPERMAN by Maggin, Swan & Anderson from issue 247, and GREEN LANTERN by O'Neil & Adams from GL 76, the first GL/GA story.

New titles: DEMAND CLASSICS, reprinting superhero tales from the 1950's & 1960's (#1 is "Flash of Two Worlds", #2 "Ghost of Ferro Lad"); DYNAMIC CLASSICS, with 1970's reprints, including the Goodwin & Simonson complete Manhunter series; BATTLE CLASSICS; and WESTERN CLASSICS, reprinting half a Bat Lash tale at a time, plus other western material. Moving on to the new-material titles, ARMY AT WAR and STRANGE ADVENTURES are anthology comics, while THE VIXEN is a black Conway heroine, and SWAMP THING should return in the autumn, scripted by Pasko and drawn by Orlando, with any luck.

The story that would have been in the GREEN LANTERN SPECIAL is being used in GL #s 111 & 112; after DC SPECIAL SERIES #14, the second ORIGINAL SWAMP THING SAGA issue, all DCSS issues will be in the $1 format with 64 pages and no ads.

Don Newton has drawn the "Unsolved Cases of Batman" feature for BATMAN 305 & 306.

Jim Starlin is writing and drawing the Batman stories, and covers, for BATMAN FAMILY #21 and #22.

The SHOWCASE schedule; #104 is O.S.S., #105 DEADMAN by Wein, Conway & Aparo, #106 Ditko's CREEPER, #s 107-9 a new western strip written by Conway... with WORLD OF KRYPTON and THE HUNTRESS to follow.

A second 5 STAR SUPER-HERO SPECTACULAR will be out in January.

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The recently-found unpublished Fleisher & Kirby SANDMAN issue is being worked into KAMANDI #61 by Jack C. Harris.

CINNAMON starts in WEIRD WESTERN TALES #48; KOBRA returns in SUPERMAN #327; the new team on CLAW will be Tom DeFalco (as of #14) & Romeo Tanghal (with #13); Paul Levitz is giving up scripting the LSH in their monthly book to Gerry Conway; KRYPTO ends his stay in SUPERMAN FAMILY in issue #192, giving the other strips more space.

DC COMICS PRESENTS #4 is the first Len Wein-written issue, with the Metal Men as the Man of Tomorrow's guests. Len's also written a 2-part LSH story which will be used in the back of SUPERBOY/LSH #246 and #247, involving a Superboy-less Legion fighting the Fatal Five; THE DEMON is to replace the Huntress in BATMAN FAMILY 21 for at least three issues, with Len Wein & Mike Golden in charge. In BF 20, Ragman guest-stars in the Batman story, by David V. Reed, Mike Golden & Bob Smith -- other guests are Jason Bard (with Man-Bat) and Elongated Man & Red Tornado (with Batgirl & Robin).

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KAMANDI
THE LAST BOY ON EARTH!
Featuring TALES FROM BEFORE AND AFTER THE GREAT DISASTER!
PRESENTING OMAC THE ONE MAN ARMY CORPS IN HIS OWN SERIES BY THE ONE AND ONLY JIM STARLIN!

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Mike Nasser will pencil BLACK LIGHTNING #12--and now the bad news, the inker will be Vince Colletta; JONAH HEX #18 will be drawn by Val Mayerik & Danny Bulanadi; the HAWKMAN strip in DETECTIVE will be drawn by Rich Buckler & John Celardo; Bob Smith will ink Romeo Tanghal's issues of CLAW; Johnny Craig has drawn a story for HOUSE OF MYSTERY #263, Tom Sutton one for #264; and WEIRD WAR #69 is another SF issue, with stories drawn by Howie Chaykin and Alex Nino, while #70 has tales drawn by Alfredo Alcala and Walt Simonson, both scripted by David Michelinie.

The budget for the two-part SUPERMAN film is now $50,000,000 -- it's still due for its American premiere in December.

The STAR TREK movie, with a budget of a mere $15,000,000, has yet to be started, but Spock, Kirk, McCoy, Scott, Chekov, Sulu, Uhura, Nurse Chapel, and Yeoman Rand are all signed; Gene Roddenberry is the producer, and Robert Wise the director.

Charlton's production has slowed down, as their printing plant has been busy reprinting a further 30 books for Modern Promotions; this batch includes CAPTAIN ATOM 85, E-MAN 1, 3 & 4, HERCULES 10 & 11, JUDOMASTER 94 & 96, PEACEMAKER 1 & 2, and THUNDERBOLT 57 & 58. These should all be available in America in a few months, in bags of three for a dollar.

Gold Key are reviving FLASH GORDON in July, probably continuing the King and Charlton numbering by starting with #19.

THE ADVENTURES of

# CAPTAIN FROG

NOM DU CHIEN WEEZ ZAT ACCURSED 'ELMET ON 'EEZ 'EAD, ZERE IS NO WAY I CAN DE FEAT BLACK CAESAR NOW!

WHILE ABOVE...

EXCUSE ME MADAM- DO YOU HAVE A LICENCE FOR THIS ARENA?

YOU ARE UNDER ARREST FOR IMPERSONATING A ROMAN GOVERNOR! I MUST WARN YOU THAT I WILL TAKE DOWN ANYTHING YOU SAY!

WHAT IS YOUR NAME?

BODICE.

BY THE ESPIRIT DE CORPS OF THE GENERAL! CAN THIS BE THE END?!

RIGHT PAIRABOLIX!

WE ARE AREN'T WE

TO CAPTAIN FROG'S AMAZEMENT A HOOK APPEARS SEEMINGLY FROM NOWHERE!

NO! I MEAN RIGHT, HOOK HIS HELMET — NOW!

FORMIDABLE NOW THE HEROIC STRANGER MAY USE HIS...

WHAT AM DE MEANIN' OF DIS?!

GARLIC-POWERED HYPERBREATH!

AND SO IT CAME TO PASS THAT CAPTAIN FROG REAPPEARED IN THE 20th CENTURY LEAVING ASTEROID AND PAIRABOLIX FREE TO RETURN TO GALL!

AND THAT IS WHY, EVEN TODAY, SO FEW ROMANS ARE RASTAFARIANS

# MADE IN AMERICA

BY HOWARD P. SIEGEL

## THE IMMORTALIZATION OF THE AMERICAN COMIC STRIP

The American comic book format, as we know it today, was established in 1933. FAMOUS FUNNIES was a collection of newspaper comic strips; until the advent of original material, such as the adventure-mystery type stories in DETECTIVE COMICS #1 four years later, comic books relied exclusively on the Sunday comics for material. As late as 1961 newspaper reprints in comic form could be purchased from off the magazine racks--titles such as COMICS ON PARADE, ACE, the aforementioned FAMOUS FUNNIES, TIP TOP, and FUTURE come to mind. So it is no coincidence that comic collectors and panelologists reserve a large part of their consideration for newspaper strips. For many years after World War II, only vest pocket size "museums" scattered throughout the USA sheltered respectable collections that covered the history of the newspaper comic genre.

In 1946, a small, elite group of American professional cartoonists organized the National Cartoonists Society. It now numbers over 500 of the world's foremost people from every phase of illustration, including animation, advertising, sports, greeting cards, and editorial cartooning. In 1974, the realization of a dream was accomplished; a committee was appointed to investigate establishing an institution devoted exclusively to collecting, preserving and exhibiting cartoon art.

The task proved a formidable one, and numerous sites throughout the USA were rejected. Eventually Mort Walker, creator or co-creator of such strips as SAM AND SILO, BEETLE BAILEY, BONER'S ARK, and HI AND LOIS, remained the sole survivor of the original committee of 20. He convinced the then president of the NCS, Jack Tippit (now Director of the Museum) of the importance of the undertaking, and together they continued to search for an appropriate site. Greenwich, Connecticut finally provided the first home of the MUSEUM OF CARTOON ART. It was a stately white mansion owned by one of the area's founding pioneer families. The 75-year-old building had been empty for quite a while, and was in a terribly messy state. Three years later we were to look back at the clean-up task as being child's play, compared to what faced us at "The Castle"... Nevertheless, the doors were open to the public in May 1974; the plans were grandiose, but the limited parking space, restrictive design of the house, and all the minor problems that a young and unusual enterprise must cope with prevented the staff from accomplishing all that it wanted to.

A major part of the exhibit hall was a Hall of Fame, honoring a select group of luminaries. There one could see the work of Richard Outcault, including a YELLOW KID Sunday original from 1896; Bud (Mutt & Jeff) Fisher; Harold (Prince Valiant) Foster; Rudolph (Katzenjammer Kids) Dirks; George (Krazy Kat) Herriman; and many more. The main halls contained original art (we had over 40,000 pieces from all over the world), including pages from comic books; a large swinging portfolio, changed every three months, contained Sunday pages from 1910 and every subsequent decade. There was a theatre, used on the first Sunday of each month as a lecture room for an NCS guest speaker, and at other times to keep youngsters entertained with movie cartoons while their parents roamed the halls. Special glass cases held toys & novelties bearing the likenesses of cartoon characters; one of the most popular of these

presentations was a series of plastic models of DC and Marvel super-heroes. There was a series of panels showing how both newspaper strips and comic books are produced, from the original typed (and hand-corrected) script, through pencils, inks, colouring, photostating, plate-making and printing to the final product. The staff was always on hand to answer questions--and the bookstand by the door made available prize books, pamphlets and cards dealing with cartoons.

By the second year it had become clear that more room was needed. The thousands of pieces of art, research material in the way of books, articles, fanzines, photographs etc were impossible to catalogue. A system other than the Dewey Decimal was needed, as was more room to set up a research library for scholars, would-be zine writers and editors, professional researchers and authors, advertising agencies, and students working on papers for Masters and other degrees. As an honorary curator, with the help of my longtime friend John Ryan (Australia's foremost expert on "Down Under" cartoon art), a special Australian exhibit was put together; the assistant chief of the Australian Legation came to Greenwich to put his country's official blessing on it --but the project ended there. We had no room to keep it on display. Also, much of our reference material was impossible to locate when required, put away in the upstairs storage areas. It soon became apparent that the original intentions of the Museum could not be fulfilled under the conditions we were operating within.

The answer to our plight came in 1977. The Federal Government allowed the NCS to purchase Ward's Castle, a registered national landmark and an edifice rich in local Westchester County history. It had been abandoned some years before, and lack of attention, the harsh weather, and general neglect had left it in a simply horrible condition. As one of those who wielded putty knife and broom, I can confirm this! But, thanks to many, a formal opening occurred last November; a visitor can now drive up the winding road, past a very rare male chestnut tree growing over the auto path from the main entrance, find plenty of parking space, walk up the colonaded portico into a grand entranceway lit by a large glass chandelier, and ease his (or her, Miss Glancy) way along the specially-made carpet, woven to display a montage of comic strips and characters in panelled colour, into the many exhibit areas. The lecture room faces a stage on which a movable lectern, slide screen and reverse screen projector can accomplish in Victorian surroundings what was difficult to do previously. The international area will now have a room of its own, and the likes of GARTH, MODESTY BLAISE and THE TRIGAN EMPIRE of today, along with pieces from PUCK, ALLY SLOPER and PLAYBOX from earlier times, can be given proper display along with similar Italian, German, Latin American, Spanish, Russian, Australian, Chinese and Japanese material.

The slide show exhibits which I curate, such as "The History of American Comic Books", "Popular TV Heroes", and "From Pulps To Comic Books", using comic book covers from my private collection, have proven to be very popular with the younger visitors; they will now be out of the main stream of traffic, and given an arena allowing more than two or three people to control the changing of the slides, and watch the exhibit at the same time. A library, a workshop, and other exhibits will be on the upper two floors; and all this is housed amidst 1800s architecture and furnishings, with spiral staircases, and all the splendour conducive to our educational enterprise. We have been told that the Museum of Cartoon Art is the largest existing entity of its kind--that is what our target has always been. We've only scratched the surface, though; the cleaning up, rebuilding of quarters, and opening of crates continues. We have goals and timetables; and also devotees whose help and support have been immeasurable.

It all started with the first penny cartoon page, and the "All In Color For A Dime" book--the end is nowhere in sight. I hope that some day Great Britain will have its own Cartoon Art Museum. Your history and products, past and present, cry out for such an enterprise. Think about it...

-HOWARD P. SIEGEL

# STOP MESSING ABOUT

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design - Neil Alsop

# BE SEEING YOU!!

# reaction

I was pleased to receive my copy of Bem this morning. However, the pleasure would be greater if this could occur six times a year (subtle hint). I'm glad to see Mike Cruden throwing out plenty of questions in Reaction, and I thought I might reply to a couple.

No, I don't think in-depth articles belong in Bem; shorter, open-ended ones should be used, thus leaving room for an in-depth lettercol based on ideas and subjects brought up in said articles. This would leave subjects open to greater argument as not all facets will have been quickly covered and dismissed in the article. This would also make for greater reader participation, and a more interesting lettercol.

Another question in a similar vein was if the columns should be rotated to avoid stagnation. To me this seems an excellent idea, but another way of solving the same problem would be, instead, to rotate the writers of the columns, keeping the subject matter the same, providing an interesting variety of viewpoints, as is obtained in the Review Section when there is more than one review of the same comic. /(Could be, but a problem is that the column contents are so nebulous anyway, so the danger is of a K. Williams Katholicity reading like a K. Williams Sigh... Pastiches of the columns might be interesting, however.)/

I'm sure I don't know what a "proper" comic mart would be. I can't think of anything to improve the present system; if there is a way it would be to improve communication between individual fans, though how this could be done I cannot imagine. I get the most enjoyment from a mart by going early and just speaking with the people waiting outside -- the people most willing to talk are the ones selling comics outside.

Yes, by all means add on 4 more pages for 5p, but not if you intend to waste the space with articles like the Steve Gerber interview, that particular item was almost totally non-informative, and also boring. Use the extra space to include more fan art or strips. /(Interviews are in danger of replacing pro-art in worthlessness value. Time was, any scratchings by any pro would see print, and the reader would be left trying to decide whether the drawing was of Superman or the Batplane. Now, any interview is automatically deemed worth printing, whether or not the interview asks any sensible questions or the interviewee gives any informative answers.)/

It is a nice idea to give cover repros to contributors, but keep the option open. Myself, I want a free issue of Bem if I get printed, especially if you use the page increase, and go up 5p a copy.

I didn't like the cover this ish. The use of blue seemed wasted, and the drawing (though good) looked as if it was half finished or a rough layout. Take the cover repros off the front, I'm sure a dynamic drawing like last ish would attract more buyers. And, to end on a controversial point, I would like to know if K. Williams' nickname for Machine Man, "Machy", is pronounced (a) macky, (b) mashy, or (c) matchy? /(or (d) rubbish? But seriously, I presumed (b) mashy.)/

-Rob MacGillivray

Bem ≠18 was, as always, an interesting package. Of note this issue were the Gerber interview and Reaction. Frank Plowright's controversial comments didn't shock me all that much; the only one I'd take him to task on was his comment on Don McGregor "padding" a story. In my opinion, all the prose in his stories was needed, and it all counted--the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. How could "A Death In The Family" have lost the stalking sequence, or the race at the beginning? Each scene was summarized at the end of the page, and all the scenes complimented each other to create a complete picture. If Frank is attacking the amount of story in each comic, I still don't see his point, as the plot from a McGregor comic would, in my opinion, read for the same length as a Claremont or Conway plot, even though it would lose all the expressive prose. /(Total agreement. Also, McGregor's prose is not dispensable; it adds a great deal to the feel of the story, in the same way Wein's descriptive passages added so much to Swamp Thing. Both writers used captions as they should be used, not simply to describe what's happening in the panel, as Gardner Fox used to in FLASH etc, but to combine with the graphics to increase, through sheer excellent writing, the excitement or, more usually, atmosphere of the moment.)/ As to his other points, Conan is indeed increasingly samey; I haven't been left affected by an issue since the Savage Tales Starlin reprint. Chan's inks, although beautiful in the first two issues, now only seem niggly. He likes to embellish everything to the point of silliness. /(I still get a lot of enjoyment from Conan, just as I did from FF and Spidey when they were in their 80s; wonder if Conan will still be as interesting when it's approaching ≠200? I also get a lot of enjoyment from the Philipino-style inking, which doesn't just result in photo-ready pencils, but adds extra dimension and appeal to the whole page. More for yer money, y'see, gov.)/ Claremont, who I met just after he'd taken over Ms Marvel, didn't seem too excited by the project, though from the scripts on recent issues he does seem to be finding his stride. Jack Kirby just embarrasses me. He takes all the stuff he produces so seriously. Ha! He's the only one!

Getting on to Spider-Woman (no, not literally!), I did quite enjoy it, and I don't think K. Williams' comments are warranted. Kids are going to pick it up thinking it's all about Spidey's sister, but as soon as they realise, they're going to take the story on its own merits. So, eventually, Spider-Woman will gain her own audience. -Jim Pyman

It was a pretty good idea to incorporate Fantasy Trader into Bem, but I wonder how long it'll last. After all, after only one issue both you and Mike seem to have got bored with the idea, hence FT being sold in shops as well as given out with Bem. /(We weren't bored with FT being part of Bem. We just thought it better, for a variety of reasons, if FT had its own inherent individuality, at least as far as shop sales go. In fact, the Bem/FT amalgamation does seem to be working out well.)/

Next, onto one of my favourite parts of the issue: Reaction. Frank Plowright has evoked some comment from me. I feel the only reason Nova has gone bi-monthly is that Marv isn't putting the effort into it that he did when it first came out. Marv's alright to start off a character, and he has, admittedly, got some pretty good ideas, but he soon grew tired of writing the book, and consequently its sales dropped. I now find myself buying NOVA to keep my set complete, and in the hope that Marv again finds his feet with the book, and brings out some more of his better ideas, which we all know that he's got tucked away. I also can honestly say I don't miss Captain Britain one single bit. Do you think he could be arrested for using his staff as an offensive weapon or something to keep him out of comics for good?

Now onto The Human Fly, the current "let's slang it, guys" comic. Come on, it isn't unreadable, as some of Jack Kirby's recent efforts, like Devil Dinosaur. Having said that, I'm going to admit I did like Machine Man ≠1, but like all Kirby ideas, it's bound to get over-used.

Talking of over-used concepts, the news of HTD's bimonthly drop didn't surprise me a single bit. The book has gone from good to silly and boring. I don't think I'll buy HTD as an advance order import, it's not worth it at the moment. /(I must admit I've found Howard somewhat tedious from about No.6 onwards, but that might be me rather than the Duck. Howard is a very cultural comic, i.e. it is written very much for the American public, so I, and I would presume most other non-Americans, get the feeling I'm missing a lot of the references, which might make all the difference (but probably wouldn't) -- I had the same feeling about "Annie Hall".)/ -Ian Abrahams

When I saw Miles Curtis' letter in Bem 18, I was deeply wounded for a nanosecond -- but his criticism wasn't logical. Of course I'd heard of these fanzines before, it was the assumption that they were "just names" without further elucidation that annoyed me. Anyway, H.P.S. more than made up for this with his Marvel article. The Bullpen sounds like a really weird place! Katholicity was great again--Kath doesn't give masses of facts, but she always gives highly entertaining reading.

On the other hand, the advertised Gerber interview was disappointing, and read as if it was intended for people in complete ignorance of him previously. Surely any fan would have amassed a lot of this background on Gerber and his philosophy just by reading his comics. Still, that's the fault of the interviewer.

There seems to be, in Bem and elsewhere, a feeling currently that dealers are stopping contact between fans. Do a lot of fans wish to vocalise their opinions? Judging by fan apathy, you would think not. Besides, there is nothing to stop two people parking their arses in a corner and talking if they really want to. By cutting down on tables, organisers will only exclude the section of fandom interested in spending money, not change their habits.

I can think of other words for British comics than "hilarious" and "very funny". How about "cobblers", "bollocks", or "shit" -- or on a more objective note try "puerile", "nauseating", "mindless", and "race and class divisive"?

A chunky, in-depth article would be appreciated. /(Why not provide one?)/ How about rotating Made In Britain--somewhere in the orbit of Uranus?

-Colin French

I hardly need say it, do I? Bem-18 is still the best fanzine available, except for that (Yech!) cover. Why is it that you persist in using these feeble covers? They probably lose you money. ≠17 was the only cover which was good enough for its contents--the strange thing is that some of the interior art is so good. I'd rather see a page of spot illoes kept together with sellotape than the mess that was my first glimpse of this issue. /(Why is it that so many fans, when they come across something they dislike, feel an urgent need to be insulting, rather than simply critical. I'm sure Jonathan, if he had wanted to, could have been more specific than "yech!" "feeble" and "mess", and if he had, it's quite probable that Martin would have taken him more seriously -- I certainly would. Surely it wouldn't have stretched his linguistic abilities too much to have described the cover as rushed or sketchy or too faint, which were its main defects. Specific and constructive criticism is always more useful, and more likely to be accepted, than the derogatory insults Jonathan slung around.)/

Before going on I would like to answer Mike Cruden. I am not the sum total of all TSOCE members, and therefore do not know what the society will achieve. But they could quite easily do almost anything, given half a chance (and another hundred members). A decent cheap import service, on a regular basis, plenty of fanzines, a new type of comic mart--minus most of the dealers and plus, well, plus whatever the members want. (That is a "proper" mart.) OK Cruden, you can be cynical now. /(Oooo thank you. Any individual in pursuing his own interests hastens the collapse of the society he is a part of. Ahh, I feel much better after that. My question from last issue, "What should a Comics Society try to accomplish?", was aimed at fandom in general, not just at you. Nevertheless, "almost everything" and "whatever the members want" is somewhat vague. Mind you, cheap imports alone almost makes it worthwhile--but a few more positive suggestions wouldn't go amiss.)/

Bem 18, as I said, was another example of the greatest fanzine available; the News was short, interesting and to the point, and, with an interview of surprising interest (surprising mainly because of the interviewee), Bem is ready to beat CMN at its own game. All the columns and features were up to standard; Made in Britain (read "Made in Europe"?) is beginning to be a bit cramped, two pages, including "Comic Comics", the main column, and one on the Asterix type of album might be better.

-Jonathan Rogers

Interesting interview with Steve Gerber, and I fully believe that the Kidney Lady really exists. There are a whole lot of strange people about now...

Miles Curtis asks why I don't start a fanzine myself; at the moment I just would not have time. Mainly because I have quite a few exams over the next few months (no, not 'A' or 'O' levels). However, I am available to write LoCs and silly things for any other fanzines who want me.

Sincere thanks, Mike, for telling me what I'm suffering from; 'epistolmania'. I used it to great effect when I wanted an afternoon off work, everyone was very sympathetic. But seriously, you don't <u>have</u> to sympathise with my compulsive writing syndrome--I enjoy having it. (Oops--I've left myself wide open with the last four words, haven't I?) /("Wide open" indeed! Get thee behind me, Satan!)/ /(Okay...)/

I know of one copy of "Satan's Tears" that Colin Campbell sold -- I've got it! Mind you, <u>I</u> didn't pay for it, a friend of mine did. /("Friend" seems too mild a term for someone who'd do that. "Lifelong and bountiful-hearted dear beloved" seems nearer. Wish I had a lifelong and bountiful-hearted dear beloved...)/

Theo Clarke: I wouldn't stoop so low as to use scented notepaper to get a letter published. There are <u>much</u> better ways of persuasion... /(Oh, I agree, I agree completely, and just remember <u>I'm</u> the editor of the lettercol, and, may I add, entirely ((aside to Martin -- nearly said "without scruples", but that would have left <u>me</u> "wide open"!)) unprincipled.)/

Now on to a serious point; of course women in comics are exploited. And you did rather encourage it, Mr Cruden, at one time. What's that? You can't remember when? Try Bem-10, on the third page of Reaction, you were speaking about "The UK Heroine Addict" at the time. (Before I go on I wish to make it clear that, although I agree with some of Women's Lib's aims I am not one of the 'lunatic libbers'.) Right, we all know that whatever anyone says, it's not going to make any difference to Marvel or Warren or DC's sales pullers. But so many heroines have revealing costumes, gorgeous bodies -- and no brains! It's the "dumb blonde syndrome" all over again, "a girl can't be glamorous <u>and</u> sensible"--why not? I'm just average but, to be crude, I have tits and a bum the same as every other woman--be strange if I didn't--and I'd be very insulted if anyone was only interested in me for <u>that</u>. And so would most other women. /(At least Marvel have made an effort to avoid that cliché. Phoenix appears to be one of the most potentially powerful characters now around. Nobody would accuse the Black Widow of being brainless or lacking in individuality, although there was a period when she was becoming a reflection of, or at least dependant on, Daredevil. Storm almost makes it, but then they have to make her helplessly claustrophobic. However, Maureen, old chap, it does seem that women are much more concerned with their physical characteristics and attributes than men are.)/

OK, serious bit over. Rotating features? Yes, not a bad idea at all, but how would you decide on which to rotate? Take a vote on it, maybe? Then, would you get enough votes for it to be a feasible way to find out what the readers really want?

-Maureen James

The Batman stories in DETECTIVE at the moment are my current favourites -- the Englehart and Rogers portrayal of the Batman, Joker etc has breathed new life into the strip. The art is better than the old Adams issues -- even that was average in places, though generally superb. Even Marshall Rogers' sound effects have been artistic in MISTER MIRACLE. The definitive comic-artist? /(I think it's worth bearing in mind that Rogers had Adams to draw upon (sic!) as inspiration, though I'm not suggesting for a moment he's a member of the School of Adams Swipers, whereas all Adams had was a campy Infantino, and lots of awful earlier versions. I still prefer Adams. I doubt that Rogers would be capable of a Superman-Ali book, for example, though, given a few years... (I just hope and pray he's still in comics in a few years.) Meanwhile, here comes Golden.)/

Rich Morrissey's article in Bem-17 on comic-writing was very interesting. New characters <u>do</u> need to be created; surely the time is right now, with the current Science Fiction craze. /(Total agreement. If everyone is on the ball, "Star Wars" and "Close Encounters", to be followed by "Superman", should be the best things that have happened for comics in years. As an example of not being on the ball, where's D.C. Thomson's token SF cash-in comic?)/

I think Bem's increasing professionalism is a good thing. The standard of material is higher, which gives it more appeal to the average comic fan in a shop -- don't let it get boring, though!

-Jerry Rees

Thanks very much for Bem, full of interest...especially Made in Britain, which is what we are all about.

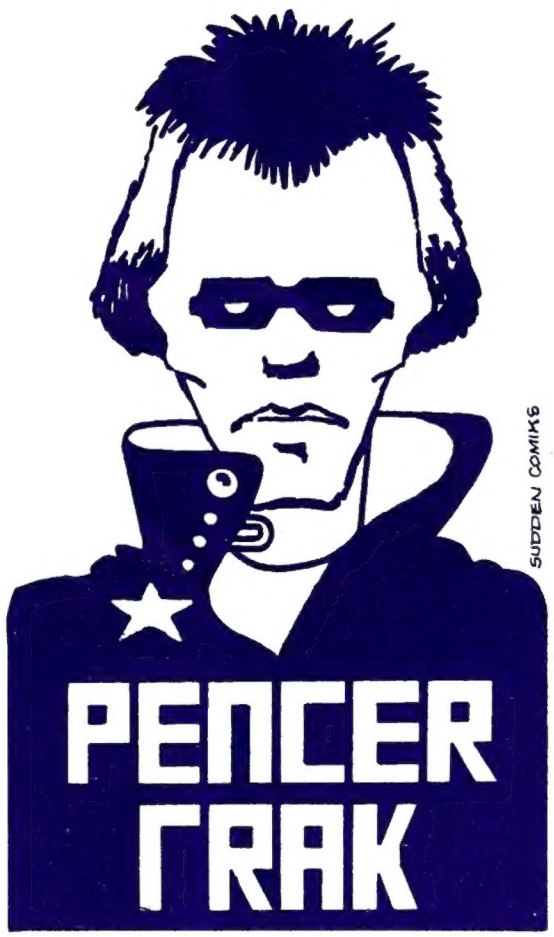
Pencer Trak is a character who was part of a very rough draft of a story for 2000 AD which has got no further. He is a robot detective in Orcosmic Space -- a sort of organic world. Highly logical, and programmed for extreme violence etc. He is everlasting... regenerating, unlike his 'human' masters. I may get something together on it in the future.

-Martin Dutton

I must admit I didn't like this issue's cover as much as the last one, but that was only to be expected. Talking of that, I'd quite like a repro of Bem-17's cover, but on the other hand, a free Bem saves me 25p, not to be sneezed at. And here's Jonathan Rogers trying to convince me that £2.40 is not any amount of money--a fair deal for pauper-collectors, that's what I say. (The number of people collecting paupers has definitely decreased of late.) Actually, I have an in-built defense mechanism against joining clubs; I always feel that the next step is badges, and secret codes, but that is probably unfair to Socky, and cheap comix is a very good idea, though the overall arms of such a society seem obscure. I don't really believe that 'fandom', a mythical organisation comparable to the LSH and CIA, really exists as a unified body, and I also believe that attempts to create it are doomed to failure, and are not necessarily desirable anyway. /(Fandom as an organisation probably doesn't exist, but doesn't (comic) fandom really refer to all the people interested in comics. These people are organised in a cohesive whole, in the same way that all those interested in music, or who attend concerts (Marts) or read N.M.E. (fanzines) aren't organised to any significant degree. Why should we/they be? That <u>isn't</u> a rhetorical question.)/ Surely Marts have to be dealer-orientated, as that is what most people go for? And in what way are marts a "rip-off"? It can't possibly be the admission fee, so it must be the price of comics on sale. I agree that, conceivably, a society that comprised the majority of comic fans in the U.K. could force prices down by not buying them, but that would hardly be in the best interests of those fans who buy with a view to investment; besides which, a large proportion of fans are also dealers, I am sure. Dealers are not a gang of cut-throats like the Mafia or Opec, who go off every few weeks to plot how best to rip off the fans--well, I don't think so, anyway.

Some interesting news items... a very appropriate artist lined up for Cinnamon, I see, Jack Abel--Abel, get it? Oh well, never mind. Anyway, sounds a real barrel of laughs. The problem with learning about various comics that you'd like to get is that by that time it isn't possible to order them from various advance import lists, and I find it difficult to track them down. I don't really see the rationale behind featuring the funny comics. That is not to say that I don't think there are people who derive amusement from them, it is just that those people know about them already, while others are not really going to be interested. Of course it could all be a joke, which is the theory that I'm working on at the moment.

Mailzine seems a strange idea. I mean, with an apa there is an obligation on the members to supply a certain amount of material, but with this there is no such obligation, so I wonder who exactly would fill the pages. It might be worth joining just to find out. Sure I'd like to contribute things to fanzines but the reason I don't is, simply, lack of comics. You see, basically the most logical thing to write about is comics, be it centered on an artist, a title or a character, but I just haven't got enough comics to do this; if I wrote an article it would be full of phrases like "I didn't get the next 15 issues but I'm sure they're very good..."




--not very thrilling, in other words. Of course, I could write about "Daredevil" or "The Defenders", circa 1974-6... I'm sure that this accounts for a lot of people not contributing material. The only other reason I can offer for not flooding the world with literary gems is my shy, modest and unassuming nature, i.e. I probably wouldn't speak to anyone ever again, if it was criticised. Naturally, the only thing holding me back art-wise is my inability to draw, though that is probably a defeatist attitude; after all, it never stopped Don Heck. /(The lack of a sizable collection may prevent you from doing a historical article, but not an opinion piece. I haven't seen a good article on Howard, Marshall Rogers, Don McGregor, Steve Englehart, Star Wars, or War of the Worlds; all subjects recent enough for you to have most of the necessary material, I would think?)/

No way am I going to buy "Ms Marvel" merely for semi-naked ladies; I don't buy it at all, mainly because of the awful name and derivatively unoriginal costume. Yuk! I am a firm believer in the theory that communists and fascists have secretly joined forces in a plot to destroy the English language, and I feel that the introduction of the word "Ms" is a prime weapon of these "neo-nasties" (which shows what a fool I am)...still, you have to use it sometimes, or else...

Yes, I would like to see more pages in Bem (not too keen on the higher price, though), and perhaps some of that extra space could be filled with a "chunky" article (love that word...chunky, chunky, chunky...excuse me, I got a bit carried away there...). Howard Siegel's article was a great way to close the issue, a really nice piece that was not only written with some insight and knowledge, but was also very informative, unlike some articles that tend to go to great lengths to tell you things you already know. To continue rambling aimlessly until I find a theme I can expand rationally; I feel that the introduction of a uniform 50 cent size is a very good move indeed, and could be just the courageous sweeping change that was needed to get things really humming. I don't think that the (ever-shrinking) 17 page format, or whatever it is now, could have survived very much longer while increasing in price so regularly. One might almost say of the news "volat atri turbius instar enitum sic sora fremont nec fulmine tantis dissullant crepitis." Mind you, you'd be a fool if you did. What am de meaning ob all dis jive-talking on de part ob dis Black Caesar? And who is dis Frog, huh? We is reporting de whole Bem-t'ing to de "Race Discrim'natin' Board", an' den you is gonna be in some mighty hot water. Dis am de racialist slur!

Well, to conclude, I'd just like to urge all members of Bem's staff to hold aloft the shining Holy Rod of Truth, and be imperturbed by any old men screaming bits of arrows into the night-time air (end of Obscure References Dept.)--in other words, keep on doing what you're doing.

-Simon Booth

It would seem to me that fanzines are produced by and for comic collectors, so how about an article on how fans store their comics? I for one would find this very informative; storing just a thousand comics is a problem. At the moment all my comics are individually packed in polythene bags, sealed with low tack tape and filed away in cardboard boxes -- however, this method does make the spare bedroom look a bit untidy, having the floor covered with cardboard boxes, so I'm thinking of buying some second-hand filing cabinets to store them in. This could prove to be rather expensive, and it would be interesting to hear how other collectors solve their storage problem.

So how about an article? Or, maybe, if you print this letter other fans may reply in Reaction. /(Storing comics has always been one of my constant headaches, and was prominent in my decision to trim my collection. When I lived in Middlesbrough I solved it, temporarily, by floor to ceiling shelving. Attics, providing they are dry, natch, can be an answer -- and comics can be a unique and affective form of attic insulation. Ian Penna got a load of supermarket-type stacking shelves, which do look rather untidy, but are extremely effective. Any more?)/

-Bill Morris

I am writing to ask a favour of you in connection with research I'm doing at the S.F. FOUNDATION. As part of a survey of S.F. booksellers, I would like, if possible, to put a notice in your fanzine to gather information from your readers as to which commercial outlets they may use to buy their science fiction.

Notice to read something like:

> You are invited to contribute to a survey investigating S.F. readership. Please send the name(s) & address(es), plus a brief description if possible, of your local/most frequently used/ favourite bookseller(s) to:-
>
> STEVE EDGELL,
> c/o SCIENCE FICTION FOUNDATION

I hope you can help me.

-Steve Edgell

Strangely, being urged to write a LoC made me look at this issue of Bem with different eyes--more of a critic and less of an interested party. I suppose that's how most fanzine reviewers feel, but for me it was a unique experience. Happily Bem survived it with its usual panache and verve, because Bem is one of those rare fanzines where the editor's personality shows through, but doesn't overpower. One of the things I like most about Bem is M. Lock's quirky humour. /(His moustache is a dead giveaway about his quirky humour!)/

But humour alone does not a fanzine make, so what else is there? Well, there is an excellent interview with Steve Gerber for a start. Taken with the one in the last CMN (well, the last one that I've seen!), it gives a fair amount of insight into SG and his relationship with Howard. I assume that it was in fact part of the same interview, yes? I can't look it up because once I've read a fanzine I give it to my son, who passes them round his schoolfriends--a few potential customers there, I should think.

"A Visit to the Marvel Bullpen" was OK if you've never read anything like it before. By coincidence I had sorted out and re-read a very similar article, by Robin Green, that appeared in Rolling Stone some years ago, a few days before Bem arrived, so as far as I was concerned it had nothing new, and was very shallow. /(How peculiar! Your views concerning the interview and the Bullpen article are directly opposite most people's, mine included.)/

Concerning Ruan's Made In Britain: a couple of issues ago he asked for recommended Tintin books. The first time I came across these was at school, when the strip was part of a magazine used in French lessons, but the first Tintin books that I read were a couple that my elder son bought. It takes a while to get into them, the humour isn't as obvious as say Asterix and relies more on recurring themes etc. I guess if you don't like it by the third or fourth try you never will. Personally I like them very much. Hergé is especially good at aircraft and cars. Some people find this realistic approach to machines, alongside cartoony people, unsettling, but it's never bothered me. Oh yes, books to recommend. Well, my own favourite is The Shooting Star Mystery, but that's partly because they land at a place in Iceland I've been to, which is neither here nor there. So try starting with Red Sea Sharks (especially if you're an aircraft freak), and then try either The Black Island, or Tintin in Tibet, OK?

I hear that this summer there's to be a hardback book reprinting D.C. Thomson's first issues, including Beano and Dandy. That's the good news, the bad news is that it will cost about £6. Howard Baker, who does the Gem and Magnet reprints, also has a comic series starting, reprinting Rainbows, et cetera. Very nice, but again the price is very high -- £8.

As has often been noted, the letter pages are the real meat of any fanzine, but I found this issue's letter column strangely muted. Perhaps all the letter writers felt the need to tone down their views, now that "cursive" Cruden is in

charge, but after all I'd read about Mike he seemed quite mellow as well. Or perhaps it's just that Bem appeals to a more mature class of reader! Or perhaps it was the mood I was in when I read it.

I see the great debate on reading comics in public goes on. Until it was mentioned I never gave it a second thought. I read comics in public when I was seven, when I was 10, 14, 20, 25, and now when I'm 30. I just assumed every comics fan did. I knew people <u>looked</u> at me when they saw me reading comics, but I often seem to attract odd looks. Tell you what a lot of <u>other</u> passengers on trains and buses find disconcerting, and that's when you take out a <u>fanzine</u> to read. Now that really worries them. As you sit there chuckling over this and that, and with all those smudgy typewritten pages with odd drawings all over the place, they're never sure if you're a sex fiend with a piece of red-hot porn, or a subversive anarchist with plans to overthrow the system. If they decide it's the latter they edge over to the doors, if they think it's the former they usually end up peeking over your shoulder. Must really throw them when all they get is a convoluted paragraph on the latest musical chairs at Marvel.

In his letter, Simon Booth mentioned the "quirk of fate" that made the Rich Morrissey article and Sigh in Bem-17 on almost the same subject. Strangely enough something similar happened this time round as well. Sigh was commenting on Rich Morrissey's piece, and Opinionette in FT was on a very similar subject, that is how little comics have changed and how little they've improved since the "Golden Age". Oh certainly on a general level there's been improvement, compare say a couple of hacks like Sal Buscema or Don Heck with some of the work done in the 1940s and they're much better. Trouble is when anyone thinks of the golden age they tend to think in terms of Will Eisner or Lou Fine, but those men were exceptions to the rule, just as Adams and Starlin are today. No doubt, when 30 years from now anthologies and histories of comics of the 1960s and 1970s are printed, it will be Adams and Starlin and company that get written about, not the competant and reliable house men who churn out the bulk of work. And unless there's a change in the direction of comics, I don't see much chance of change. Oh sure prices and page counts may change, but I see the basic superhero plodding on until some time in the mid 1980s, when we will be due for another change in direction and revitalization, just as Marvel did in the 1960s. Personally I'd like to see American comics get away from the superhero, and English comics away from football and World War II. Perhaps a comic planned to run for a certain number of issues, and with the aim of telling a specific story about certain characters. Rather like buying a novel by instalments -- hell, they could even sell embossed binders to put the things in! /(Great idea, but if the comic was unsuccessful the "certain number of issues" wouldn't be completed, and if it was successful, the series would be spun out ad infinitum. In fact, it wouldn't really make much difference. Perhaps a comic with a set of rotating features, in the style of 'The Detectives' TV series?)/

Personally, I don't see Spider-Man or Batman keeping my interest for the next ten years, not the way they're handled now, anyway. Trying to treat them as <u>real</u> people leading <u>real</u> lives becomes meaningless over a period of time. How long will it be before the Batman of now has to be shuffled off to an alternate world like the Batman of the forties and fifties? How long before even Howard the Duck runs out of comicbook and media clichés for us to laugh at? /(Never, providing there will always be comics and other media.)/

See you in the funny papers.

-Dean Smith

And now some revolutionary demands from P.A.N. (People's Absolute Neroes) and C. M.N. (Communist Mental Nuts)(back George, down Rich)--remove reproductions from the cover, slander J*m C*******, shrink type, less news, stop Mike Cruden interrupting letters with his horrible, smart-aleck comments (maybe I'd better change that), and make Fantasy Trader bigger and better.

-Gary Bell, Lisburn, Northern Ireland

Strange, writing a letter to two people at once, but I guess I'll get used to it. /(We come together as one divine entity known as BEM)/ I appreciate and enjoy the overtly 'fannish' flavour of Bem, and can easily see why the zine is popular. With the addition of FT as a supplement, Bem must be one of the best 'all-rounders' in the fanzine world; something for everyone. /(Tell it like it is, Dave...)/

If you think, Mike, that Warren have indulged in too much cheap titillation for its own sake in the past, take a look at their new '1984' mag. Some really lovely artwork wasted on really awful stories, with the futuristic settings serving only as backdrops for as much sex and as many four-letter words as the writers can cram in. The strange thing is that if '1984' was a genuine 'underground' comic I don't think I'd mind quite as much. As it is, it just serves to puncture the whole Warren mystique of a line of magazines devoted to quality rather than just pure commercialism. That mystique was probably false anyway, since Jim Warren is, if nothing else, a hard businessman. /(He is a hard businessman, very true, but I get the impression he is genuinely interested in the medium he is involved in, hence his constant appearance at U.S. cons. That could be dismissed as pure Public Relations --but at least he makes an effort to woo fandom. I haven't seen '1984' yet, but it sounds like an astute and blatant effort to cash in on what's selling at present; sex, sensationalism, and science fiction. I'm looking forward to it.)/

Chauvinism rules O.K. with 'Made In Britain'. That's all right, and it's encouraging that the old DC/Marvel blinkers are beginning to lose some of their opacity, with the recognition that good comix do exist outside America; a look at some of the superior European products is the next logical step. I suspect though that the presence of several erstwhile fans in the British comics scene is a factor in this new interest in our home-grown products -- maybe even a major one. On a purely subjective level, however, I find the vast bulk of British comics barely, if at all, palatable. They are deliberately aimed at kids, and young kids at that, and the 'quality' of the writing, and the subject matter, reflects this. On the other hand, there is undoubtedly a lot of good artwork in British comics--even if most of it lacks the superficial glamour of its American counterpart, it is at times actually more accomplished.

I do buy 2000 AD occasionally, primarily because it contains some very good art, but even so I wonder if I would bother if not for the fact that I know personally some of the contributors -- I hardly ever actually read it.

Yes, I like Bem; pity about FT, though. So it goes. -Dave Harwood, Southend

Well done, Jonathan Rogers, for your letter in support of TSOCE; for too long now British fandom has been disjointed, it needs a unifying body to push its point of view to those who matter, both publishers and distributors.

Why not form a British Comix Fans Society /(As well as the TSOCE, or instead of?)/ at the London Comicon this year? It need only be a loosely federal body, so that all fans, dealers & fanzine editors would retain their independence. /(What would be its aims and objectives?)/ Better still, elect Don McGregor as Honorary President while he is here--that might help. /(What would his duties be?)/

Well? /(Are you sure you've considered the requirements of all the wonderful suggestions you're making?)/

-Barry K. Winetrobe

Once again Bem was a very enjoyable issue, but the art was a little poor. Only Phil Elliott, Mike Matthews, Dave Byrom, Terry Moore, Bob Watkins & the Superswipe logos made the standard (myself also, of course). Be more choosey please--nothing is worse than a beautifully typed page matched up with poor artwork. /(Total agreement. Don't you get enough artwork to be more discerning, Martin? Or have you specific altruistic reasons for printing the "poorer" contributions?)/

-Joe Matthews

As your regular readers will no doubt be aware, a member of British fandom has been posted missing, believed killed, whilst on active service.

Mark Ellis, better known as Mark Ellis, first entered fandom in 1937 with an article entitled "How I Became An Amalgamite" published in WOTTO THE WIZARD'S WONDER WEEKLY, an early zine dedicated to the "Research and Appreciation of Graphic Arts as practised by Amalgamated Press". Ellis was to appear frequently in WTWWW and was later to comment on this period, "T'were 'ard graft mind y'. Were no easy rides in them days, but there's one thing it taught y'. Gettin' that journal out on t'weekly deadline gave y'feeling of responsibility ...Instilled values of appearing like dose of cascara deep in t'primordial breast."

Having enlisted in MI-5 in 1939, Ellis made his first contact with the Yankee comics when assigned to break into the American Embassy by the same official who would later comment, "Kim Philby is incoherently beyond dispute."

Following the outbreak of peace, Ellis was assigned to the Home Office Department for Investigation of The Horror Comics Situation, being transferred to Scotland Yard's "Flying Porn Squad" in 1955.

"Very few people realise", Ellis told a confidential source, "that there was a hidden motive for the banning of horror comics. ITV was just getting started at the time, and a number of Senior Officials in the pay of ITV realised that, with the competition of horror comics, Independent Television would never get off the ground. So, we banned horror comics."

In 1974, Ellis was adopted by the Foundation For Panelological Research, and embarked upon his most ambitious, nay prodigious and prestigious project, an adzine which would appear each and every month. According to a reliable source, Ellis chose the name MEDIA so fans would be fooled into buying it under the impression it was a special issue of Comic Media News. Apparently, fandom was totally taken in by this ruse, for the early issues of Media sold no copies at all. Ellis was forced to put a mortgage on his wife before sales began to pick up, and it was, now, when his dream neared completion, that the good Lord mopped his brow. Media will be continued by other hands, whilst Mark Ellis will contribute a special feature, "What Are They Doing Now?", which will feature a discussion of Howard the Duck by Jack Cole and Bill Everett.

In the Made In Britain column some time in the future I'd appreciate some information on M. Noble of LOOK-IN, presently doing "Man From Atlantis", but a veteran of "Star Trek", "Follyfoot", and "Captain Scarlet", and seemingly ignored, despite the fact that his work is as good as Frank Bellamy's, without being a copy.

One thing that's always screwed me up about futuristic stories is the strange knack they have, in comics at least, of reflecting the date they're published in. Wouldn't it have been more original if the Legion of Super-Heroes still had short hair, and conversed in sixties jabber? Yet at the same time the LSH are the only slightly weird superheroes I can think of, the only ones with hair that covers their ears. The best future I can think of is AGENT 21's, which although capitalizing on the then popular superspy craze actually set its events in 2020, instead of the hundred years hence that the other Gerry Anderson folk were stuck in...

-Graeme Bassett Grimsby
(Yes, I have adopted it as my last name)

Where exactly is the advertising manager at present? Since he's apparently moving I don't want some poor old lady wondering what back issues of FT are, or what a trade between SD & FT is, in case a new owner is already in residence--Oh, I see, poor old ladies wouldn't be seen dead in George Street! Seriously, I'd like a load of FT back issues from him, as I've only seen a few and those I've seen have had a content worth seeing. /(Aha! A chance to plug FT back issues. They cost 10p each, plus 9p total postage regardless of the number ordered. Sometime near the end of May, I, my wife, my cat, and my comics (all dearly beloved, but not necessarily in that order) will be moving to 35, Sandringham Road, Gee Cross, Hyde, Cheshire. The Post Office will be forwarding my mail for three months, though. Funnily enough, George Street is almost full of little old ladies. What they've all done with their husbands I can't imagine, but I'm relieved to be moving from that street in a vertical position...)/ -Gez Kelly

Good day, Mr Cruden! /(Good day to you, Mr Clarke!)/ The Gerber interview was interesting--he does seem to be the most aware of the Marvel/DC writers at present, and is definitely producing the kind of mature comic that I like.

Made In Britain reminded me of conversations with my local newsagents, who feel that the average British comic reader wants "lots of stories" -- no wonder that "The Complete Fantastic Four" is dying! I think that Ruan is a little premature when he says that sports fans can support a 15p weekly--I think that we should watch "Scoop" for a few more months before we make any decisions on that score.

Kathleen Glancy may care to note that not all "Girls Comics" are as bad as the dreadful "Bunty". "Spellbound"--which has now merged with "Debbie" -- carried some excellent strips, and IPC's new comic, "Misty", shows promise.

And so to Reaction. Simon Booth has put his finger on the appeal of Gerber (and McGregor). I have been trying to analyse my enthusiasm for such writers, and I now realise that it is due to their "literary" style.

If Captain Scotnat does not take up Maureen's kind offer, can I move in? Alternatively, if he does move in and makes too much noise with that caper, half of our house is empty and Ms James is always welcome. Talking of welcomes, is Robin A! Webster listening out there? I gather that the said Webster also lives in Leicester, so if he would care to drop me a line (to 50 Melbourne St, Highfields, Leicester), perhaps we could get together for a pint and a chat. /(Are you buying?)/

I can sympathize with Harry McAvinchey, but I must say that one should not <u>expect</u> a response to unsolicited artwork. My own policy is only to send my work to people that ask for it (Aha! So, this is why only a couple of dozen fans have seen my work!) --this means that I don't lose my originals and furthermore I can keep track of my published work. My apazine is essentially a showcase to the few apa members who may be interested in publishing my work. It is probably obvious that I'm not too concerned whether or not my work is published, but I do not really want somebody to publish anything of mine unless they care enough to write and ask for it. Of course, one has to get something seen before anyone will commission more--hence my apazine--but with the advent of Rob Barrow's new Mailzine even this problem can be solved.

I agree with Phil Greenaway--Fan-Things would benefit from more space. That is, if Ed is prepared to write more.

I will deal with Mike's interruptions to my last letter in order:

1. I do not really believe that Marvel or Warren are trying to get adolescents to buy comics "for a glimpse of tit or bum". I agree that the female form is a useful sales puller /(Don't the two go together?)/, but I am sure that the amount of nudity in a strip--unintentional, but silly, pun!--is due largely to the inclination of the artist. Frank Bellamy used to feature naked women regularly in his strips simply because he liked to draw them. /(I should think it's just as much due to the editor's directives, especially with Warren, and at Marvel the dictates of the writer/editors.)/

Anyway, what I was trying to say was not that the exploitation of the female figure was wrong, but rather that the implicit suggestion that the male genitals -- even covered by clothing--are 'rude', whereas female sexual characteristics are attractive. /(But that's true!)/

2. You're dead right; British fans are likely to become a rare species if comics do not progress in this country.

3. I walk a financial tightrope. I can afford to produce 20 copies of an apazine every couple of months knowing that I could not recoup that money, but I cannot risk producing 100 copies if I might lose more than the cost of 20 copies.

4. FT does seem to be recovering, slowly.

5. I wasn't suggesting that there should be no dealers at comicons. What I meant was that much of the stuff on sale is sheer commercialism. Perhaps, as you say, selected dealers may solve the problem.

6. There's no answer to that!

7. There's no answer to that, either! /(Is this a subtle way of forcing people to buy back issues?)/

I do hate to argue with Gez Kelly, 'cos he's such a nice lad, but I don't think that Bem is becoming monotonous; I like the zine as it is, and I don't really feel that it requires a main article. However, I am all for an extra four pages. 25 pence would still be a ridiculously low price for such a good zine.

Howard P. Siegel's article on the Marvel Bullpen was interesting and well written. I have always thought that most creators are stifled when they turn professional, but it had not occurred to me that this stifling could account for their alienation from fandom.

BOING! /(Boing, spoing, boing, twaing!)/

-Theo Clarke

Bem 18 was the best issue since the last (or something like that). Quite a mixed bag in the News section -- but we already knew Abel didn't kill anyone, 'twas Cain (Kane?) what did the 'orrid deed.

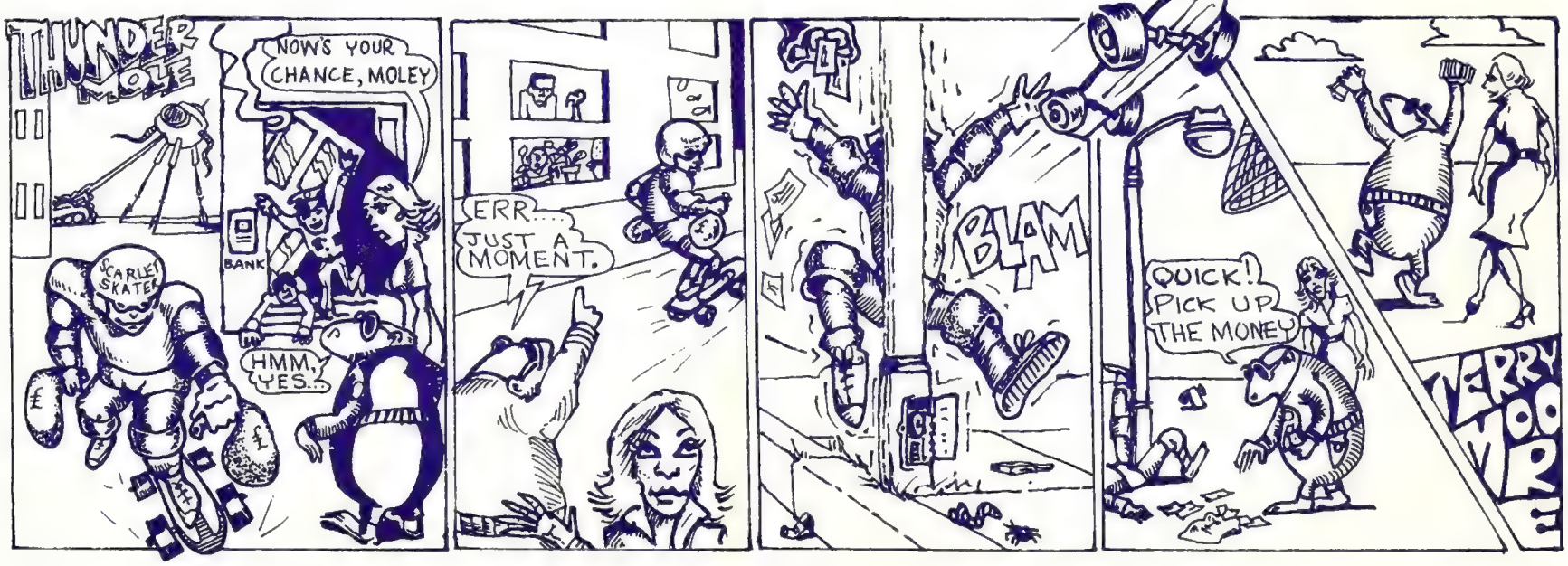
Captain Frog seems to be getting a bit samey, and can we have more Thundermole, please? Made In Britain and Fan-Things were up to their usual standards.

Which leads to Katholicity, which, as usual, is more than worth the cost of admission alone. Well, <u>I</u> totally agree with Kathleen about the Wonder Woman Spectacular; Pallas Athene is my favourite goddess too, the reasons for this being Athene's intelligence and personality and having nothing to do with the fact that Athene shares with me that mark of intelligence, grey eyes. BUNTY, huh? Well, I read Chris's copy of MISTY (see Review Section--hopefully. OK Chris, you can put down the gun now). In answer to Kathleen's competition, (1) Oliver's kinky about blonde hair (or Dinah possesses hair like that of Kyle Richmond), (2) as quickly as possible. /(oh.)/

On to Reaction. I object to the current trend to "humanise" Wolverine. Please let us <u>not</u> hear that he's misunderstood. Why not just settle for the idea that he acts misanthropically and antisocially because he <u>is</u> misanthropic and antisocial? A note to Maureen James: wallowing in epistolary nostalgia is much nicer than wallowing in mud, although, after a hard day, wallowing in a hot bath runs it a close second. In answer to Frank Plowright, the "new" appelation on Inferior Five 7-10 is explained by the fact that Jack Miller edited the first six issues, and Joe Orlando the "New" four. Bring back the I5!

Sigh--Congratulations, Mr Williams! You have cured my insomnia. Have we had five columns, or five bits of the same article? I haven't seen such a load of re-cycled platitudes since, er, since I last read Human Fly. Five columns, and all I have gathered so far is that K likes Green Lantern. To coin a phrase -- Yawn!

-Robin A! Webster



# FAN THINGS

This column will be expanding to 2 full pages in a couple of issues--I'd like to thank everyone who wrote in and asked for this. With the amount that can be fitted on a Bem page, it will make "Fan-Things" about the longest regular fanzine column; to help keep things interesting, my brief is being expanded to include some of the slick American fanzines and other limited circulation zines. But that's all in the future: let's see what's happening at the moment, shall we?

MAGUS ≠1 is reviewed elsewhere -- I can report that Phil's now sold out of this premiere production, but that issue two will soon be out, available for 20 pence from the address in the Review Section.

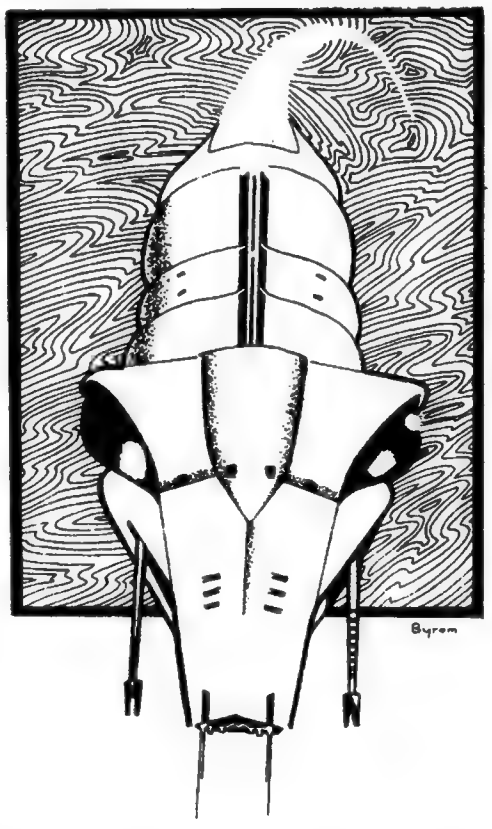
MEDIA continues to grow; I trust issue 8 is out by the time you read this, but the latest I've got now is ≠7, with 36 A5 pages for 21 pence, about half ads and half shortish features inside a 2-colour cover by Luke Rainford, an artist whose individual style takes a little while to come to terms with. And, Mark, if you'd checked the issue of Bem it had originally appeared in, you'd know the HTD drawing on page 27 was by Steve Gibson, inked by Al Matheson. This is the last issue to be edited by Mark Ellis, who, a shadow of his former self (publishing a fanzine does that for a person--especially putting out an issue every month!), bows out, leaving the zine in the hands of Phil Hall.

Graeme Bassett in Reaction may not be telling the truth about Mark, by the way, in case he has got you confused and/or nonplussed.

SOMETHING DIFFERENT was a surprise--Gez Kelly, champion of Media in Reaction and elsewhere, who seems to think that any competition to it as an adzine is a waste of effort, has gone against his own advice and produced such a zine! For 12p you get in ≠1 16 litho A5 pages, plus a free comic bag--four pages are Gez's sales list, as SD replaces his regular comics list, and other items include news, letters, and columns by Theo Clarke and Maureen (she seems to pop up everywhere these days) James. Gez has big plans for future publications, as indeed have most new fan-eds --Martin has passed on Gez's covering letter along with the review copy, and Mike has commented in the margin "I wish I had a pound for every set of projects like this I've heard of--I'd have made a fortune from Dez alone". Anyway, for his first issue, send 12p to Gez Kelly ; expect a second issue after 'O' levels.

COMIC MEDIA NEWS INTERNATIONAL ≠35 has a definite bias to "Close Encounters Of The Third Kind", which actually squeezes all comics artwork off the cover--though why "Destination Moon" occurs twice in the list of movies along the road to the UFO, I know not. CMN (or CMNI -- Richard appears unsure on this point) has the most professional covers around, and uses excellent paper--but he persists in using some very substandard typing inside, when he should really have switched to type-setting at least two years ago! As it is, despite a slight uncertainty over schedules (this issue covers three months, and the "small print" doesn't mention the frequency of publication), and an annoying habit of scrapping all the slightly fannish bits from an issue at the drop of a hat, CMN is indispensable. It's professional, no doubt profitable, and I fully expect it to get national distribution soon. Whether or not it will still be a fanzine then is a bridge we'll cross in due course. For 24 A4 pages, 8 of them ads, CMN costs 34p by post from R. Burton.

COMICS UNLIMITED ≠50 comes under the heading of "long-awaited" -- in a recent letter Alan told me it wouldn't be out for a while yet. However, the second Fantasy Unlimited comic is now out, Paul Jay's "The George, The Toad and the Rock Bumper Comic Book", at 25p for 24 6¼" x 8½" pages from Alan Austin.




While it's quite different from the inspired "Baragrin" book, it's still very funny; if you like Paul's strips in CU, here's a treat!

The Society Of Comics Enthusiasts has been re-organised. Basic membership is now only £1.00 per annum, and will bring you a newsletter every 4/6 weeks--THE SOCIETY REVIEW ≠1 is only a single A4 sheet, but Nigel Balloch intends to expand it to include letters, reviews and articles. THE COMIC REVIEW will be amalgamated with KA-POW, and appear quarterly, with about 32 A5 pages; it will cost members 10p, and non-members 30p. And if you want to know more about the cheap imports, an adzine, a comics swap service, or October's FANCON get-together, send a stamp, or better yet a pound note, to Nigel,

TSOCE is the best fan organisation we've got -- if you join it, it will become better still!

But what of Comicon 78, you ask? Well, I've checked with Rob Barrow, and we can expect the following events on the 29th & 30th July at the Bloomsbury Centre Hotel:

At ten in the morning, while the dealers are busy setting up, in the Park Room a special coffee lounge opens -- it's hoped to get a bar, with licensing extension, in there too. The registration desk opens at 10.30, and the dealers room at 12.00 noon, until 4.30. From 3.00 to 4.30 is scheduled an artists workshop, followed at 5.00 by the Eagle Awards Presentation, at 5.30 by the auction, and at 6.45 the keynote speech by Don McGregor, which should run until 8.00, followed at 8.30 by the films.

On Sunday, the films end at 8.00, and everyone drifts off for breakfast, coming back at 10.00 for the re-opening of the dealers room. A half-hour of cartoons is scheduled for 11.30, with at 12.15 a panel discussion on Dan Dare, then the lunch break, and at 2.15 until 3.30 something Rob's being very mysterious about. The Sunday auction starts at 3.45, and then, from 5.30 until ten -- more films.

That's the provisional programme; Rob also mentioned that some tables are still available, while the Con booklet's ad deadline is 10th June--to book an ad, get in touch with Alan McKenzie,

which is also the place to send details of anything you want to put in the auction (by 10th July). More details in Bem-18--and to come in Bem-20, along with the gen on Comicon II!

Jonathan Rogers is starting a fanzine, called PLEASE TAKE ONE; a 2-page prelude (A4, duplicated) is available for a 7p stamp from Jonathan at 167, Preston Drive, Brighton, Sussex BN1 6FN. He's also in need of articles, letters and reviews for the second issue-- 'nuff said?

COSMIC AWARENESS (14 8½ x 11" pages, chemically copied, from Andrew Reed, 135 Briar Gate, Long Eaton, Notts) dispenses with boring details like issue number (I assume it's a first issue) and price (not more than 20p, I trust); it has a quite nice cover by Dave "Apocalypse" Hornsby, news, a tiny article on Conan that seems to think Sphere were the original book publishers of that brawny barbarian, a short story, items on Logan's Run and the Spider-Man movie, and a couple of quite nice strips by Jim MacTaggart. It's not a bad start; I look forward to issue 2.

If you're an SF collector, SFGA might be useful--it's 25p for 32 litho 8" x 10" unreduced pages from Derek J. Rolls.

"Science Fiction & General Advertiser" is the full name--lots of books for sale, and a serialised short story.

I must say that the Comics Heroines Fan Club, the American organisation that our editor's the agent for, is putting out some nice zines these days; worth not just the sea-mail price of 60p, but the air-mail tag of £1, which gets 'em to you two months more quickly! I mentioned what THE HEROINES SHOWCASE ≠13 would contain last time--well, I've seen ≠12 now, with 36 6" by 9½" pages, type-setting, a colour cover (well, black ink on blue card) by Brent Anderson, the prelude to "The Great Red Sonja Interview" with Frank Thorne and Angelique Trouvere that's featured in ≠13, complete with photo of Wendy Pini in Red Sonja uniform; I'm impressed. Without any less of friendliness, the standard of the zine has increased greatly of late -- and this applies to the just-out sixth issue of THE ADVENTURESS, featuring an excellent strip by Lela Dowling, and other strips and stories. To join the CHFC, just send enough money to cover the cost of the next three or four issues (either at 60p or £1) to Martin Lock, who'll send it on to America. A good investment, I'd say!

Back to home-grown material, and SKYWOOD ≠3, from Donald Barr.

--a 7p stamp brings you 7 7" x 10½" photocopied pages, featuring a strip by Mark McKenzie, who also drew the Barry Smith-type cover, and Donald. If you haven't tried this zine yet, why not do so? You can't say it's expensive! What I suspect to be an SF fanzine, YCZ, has a similar price -- for your stamp, on an envelope for preference, you get a 12" by 16½" sheet folded into eight pages, and an editorial monologue similar to Graeme Bassett in fascination. The address is R.I. Barycz.

TALES OF CREATION ≠2 is the latest Joe Matthews fanzine to appear; by post, 25p brings you 20 A4 duplicated pages, from Joe.

. While I didn't care too much for the John Matthews/Bob Watkins "Ragnar the Viking" strip, there is a lot of interesting stuff--artists include Bob Watkins, Alan Hunter, Dave Byrom, Philip Elliott, Steve Gibson, Nick Neocleous and Martin Dutton, while K. Williams has a review column, and M. Lock interviews Ruan Lanihorne, who hopes to continue the chain next time by interviewing... -ED SALLIS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THE DEADLINE FOR FT ≠31 IS: JUNE 21ST


# SUE'S VIEW

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF A RECENT COMIC MART

For me it really starts the previous night, when I "volunteer" to help Mike price the comics; he shouts out the prices (yes, shouts -- it's the teacher in him), while I write them on. It's not exactly the best Friday night's entertainment I can think of, but I'm kept well supplied with Brown Ale, so it's not too bad. The only trouble is that towards the end of the evening I'm never sure whether he says thirty or thirteen, fifty or fifteen--so there could be some <u>real</u> bargains in the boxes.

Then it's up at 8.00 on the Saturday morning (<u>8.00</u> on a <u>Saturday</u> morning!). He loads up the car with boxes, while I find a pigeon to sacrifice, in the hope that the springs of the car will hold out, and we'll actually sell some of the comics. You never know, one day I might actually be able to get into the pantry. I might even be able to store some food on the shelves in there; at the moment, it's too full of comics.

Down to the M62, and over to Liverpool. We can actually find the Bluecoat Chambers now, though it used to be fun circling round and round the city centre. It gave me a chance to pick out some shops for a later visit. Park half on the pavement, give a cursory glance to the paintings outside the Chambers (most of them aren't worth anything more), carry a box up those damned stairs, find the best location that is left (what time <u>do</u> some of the dealers get up?) and stand guard while Mike makes another three or four journeys up & down the stairs, getting redder in the face each time. He goes to park the car, and the dealers come up to the table to ferret out the bargains. Usually, most of the Warren mags are sold at this time; perhaps it's only the dealers who can afford them. It's also about this time that I start cursing Mike for not marking the price on <u>all</u> his comics.

Mike returns, which gives me the chance to slip out for something to eat, and drink. Mike seems to enjoy the sandwiches and tea/coffee that Trevor and his friends make (he's never been able to figure out whether it's tea or coffee), but looking at Trevor and his friends, and being a bit particular about hygiene, I've never been able to try them.

Then the moment that all the dealers have been waiting for, as the doors are flung open, we hear the stampede up the stairs, and all the fans rush in, not knowing which table to look at first, so rushing around the whole lot, presumably trying to spot which is the cheapest. Time was when if a fan found something that he wanted he would buy it, but now he looks round every other table first, to make sure nobody else has it cheaper, comes back to ours a few times to have another look at it, then, after obvious inner debates, he might buy it. Times is 'erd, as Mike says, an' money is tight, too tight perhaps for luxuries like comics, especially in such an unemployment-hit area as Liverpool. Still, I can't help but sympathise with the little boys who obviously only have a limited amount of money, and want more than they can afford. The agonising decisions they're forced to make can be plainly seen on their faces. I even feel sorry for those who want them so badly they try to steal them (those hoverers are obvious right from the start) --I'd give them the comics if it were up to me, but I don't think Mike'd approve.

After the first mad rush is over various friends and acquaintances of Mike's wander over for a chat. Some of them even talk to me, which makes me feel a little less of an outcast; others have wives/girlfriends/mistresses with them with whom I have a mutual moan, but some act as though I don't exist. Some fans can be inadvertantly amusing. Trevor never ceases to fascinate me. How <u>does</u> he comb his hair? Does he ever <u>sell</u> any of his badges? And his half-hearted "Oh, ace" when told his tables had made £5.37 at one of the Marts. Then there's Ron Bennett, another teacher who shouts a lot, who once wore a pair of see-through trousers; his knickers could plainly be seen, but failed to excite. And there's always Paul Schofield with his rich Yorkshire accent, coupled with his smooth and quiet voice; a pleasure to listen to.

It's usually around three when Mike decides he can't sell any more. He loads up the car again, says a lot of protracted farewells, drives home, and spends the rest of the evening reading comics, with the occasional grunt to acknowledge my presence.

I love Comic Mart days. -SUE CRUDEN

((Sue would like it mentioned that Mike, er, "helped" with the composition of this piece. But then, what are husbands for?))

# REVIEW SECTION

X-MEN #111 (June)
"Mindgames" by Claremont, Byrne & Austin

This issue is just about average. The story is good, as are most of Claremont's scripts, and the artwork by Byrne is now picking up, although I would still prefer Cockrum. With the monthly status coming in two issues, the above team should soon become as good as Claremont & Cockrum. The story features my favourite ex-X-Man, the Beast, and the reappearance (from #49) of Mesmero, plus at the end the return of Magneto. Unusually, there are no loose ends left open in this issue, and not much really seems to happen--although there is a letter column. Not many Marvels can say that nowadays. -Ralph Frost

MISTER MIRACLE #24 (June)
"Double-Bind" by Gerber, Golden & Heath

This was my first sight of Mike Golden's art, and I have to admit I was suitably impressed. The Russ Heath inks obviously didn't hurt, but still, the guy's got talent; nothing really spectacular, no gimmicky effects, but just nice to look at. Steve Gerber's script takes Scott Free back to Earth, seemingly for some time, takes him to Las Vegas where he makes like Jesus Christ, chucks in a couple of sub-plots, and lets Barda muse aloud "May the Source be with you..." This is not the intense Gerber of, say, MAN-THING, but a skilled writer turning out a very competent script, with that little extra something that lifts it above the average. A very definitely recommended comic; or, as Mike Conroy might say, "****". -S. Booth

MEDIASCENE #28 (Nov/Dec 1977) $1.50

Having not bought a copy of this fanzine edited by Steranko since number 18, I thought I'd invest a pound to see if it has improved at all; it hasn't. For a start, it's incredibly poor value -- over a third of its 36 pages are filled by Supergraphics' ads, and with 2 exceptions the "articles" are merely hypos of/by the artists/publishers concerned. The exceptions are a passable article on "Close Encounters", and an interesting two-page article on Jack Kirby's aborted "Prisoner" strip. The several pages reproduced show that it's a pity the strip was never released, as Kirby's art and, surprisingly, his scripting are at a high peak. However unless you're a committed Kirby/Prisoner/CE3K fan, Mediascene 28 isn't worth your time and money. -Adrian R. Last

NOVA #19 (May)
"Blackout Means Business, and His Business is Murder" by Marv Wolfman, Carmine Infantino & Tom Palmer

This is just another comic. Nova does this, that and the other, but nothing results, not even an acceptable story. At this rate, my money's on this comic not reaching issue 30! Let's just hope that Marv stops copying Spider-Man and produces some new angles to his writing on this book. -Ian Abrahams

TARGET #1 (April 14th, 1978)
Polystyle Publications Ltd

This mag looks as if it could succeed; however, it will need all the help it can get, so if you haven't bought a copy yet, why not give it a try?

"Target", featuring Patrick Mower as Detective Superintendent Hackett, has 3 pages, 2 in colour, and is quite entertaining, although the art is blotchy in places -- there are good likenesses of Hackett, Bonney and Co. "Hazell" also has 3 pages, with better art, and a pretty neat story line too. "Kojak", with a 4-page complete story, was good, too, though they'd do better with continued stories.

"Cannon" may only have two pages, but it seems promising; the last strip, with 2 of its 3 pages in colour, is "Charlie's Angels", and it's pretty weak on both art and script.

New U.K. weeklies are not too common, and need all the support they can get. I know 20 pages for 10 pence is pricey, but surely the mag needs support to expand. So, why not give it a try! -Stephen Bailey

After 2000 AD I'd have thought SF would have made a come-back with a third try at transfering Gerry Anderson's 21st Century to the printed page, but in the first issue of COMIC CUTS, the official newsletter of the A.C.E., Denis Gifford or his tame monkey thundered "this paper promises to outdo the late unlamented ACTION", concluding "It may be the comic the kids have asked for; but have their parents?"

I suppose it all depends whether the parents mind their kids wasting the hard-earned silver. For ten pence the quality of this comic is terrible, forever staining the memory of Polystyle's COUNTDOWN. Of the strips, only "Hazell" has immediate promise, conjuring up the atmosphere of the Thames shows with Mad-style art, and a competent storyline. The BBC "Target" shows great promise of being murdered, whilst the adaptations of "Cannon" "Kojak" and "Charlie's Angels" are justifiably silly only because the sources are so. I'd be more worried about the harm done to TV ratings than kid's sensibilities, especially since most of the violence has been confined to the pop-gun shooting American cops seem to love. -Graeme Bassett

1984 #1 (June) $1.50

Big Brother may be watching you, but, obviously, the Comic Code Authority isn't watching this title. Quite frankly, I think that all ten stories here are deserving of commendation, as each one appealed to me on a different level. Talents such as Bill DuBay, Nicola Cuti, Wally Wood, Joe Vaultz, Rich Corben (in colour), Alfredo Alcala, Jim Stenstrum, Luis Bermejo, Rudy Nebres, Alex Nino and Esteban Maroto have contributed some of their best efforts for this magazine. It shows!

A wide variety of themes are dealt with in this issue, but they all emphasize humour, be it ironic, black or otherwise. Several of the stories also border on the obscene, contrasting dramatically with absurd stories such as "Bug" and "Faster Than Light". I think that the introduction epitomizes everything this title stands for. It says that a blend between old-time fun and intelligent, adult speculation will be strived for--you know something, I do believe that they've succeeded.

A superb title which is well worth your time and money. My only hope is that it lasts as long as it deserves to. -PG

FANTASTIC FOUR #195 (June)
"Beware the Ravaging Retrievers" by Wolfman, Pollard & Marcos

It's been a long time in coming, but we've finally discovered Sue Richard's other super-power -- she's a super quick-change artist (page 19). Apart from that though, the book was rather nice, firstly because it guest-starred Subby, and secondly because the featured FF member was <u>not</u> the Thing or the Torch. The Reed Richards segment seemed to point the way to the conclusion of the "FF split" story, which will obviously take place in #200, just after we've had a few issues spotlighting the brains of the group.

The only thing that really was wrong with the book was the last panel of page 22; Namor would never give up like that, and he certainly wouldn't say "The fight is over", not on this plane of existence anyway. Still, things are looking up for the FF, and now all we need is continuity with MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE and a few more letters pages. -Martin S. Forrest

STEEL, THE INDESTRUCTIBLE MAN #3 (June)
"When Hammer Meets Steel" (10 pages) by Gerry Conway, Don Heck & Joe Giella; "A Night Without Heroes" (7 pages) by Gerry Conway, Juan Ortiz & Bruce Patterson

Here we have further evidence that a writer like Conway shouldn't be as pampered by DC as he is. Steel is nothing more than a surrogate Captain America, suffering from cliché dialogue and stale plots. The comparison is obvious, I suppose, when one looks at them together; both wear the colours of America, and both are active during World War II as soldiers.

Neither story has very much to offer. The first one deals with the well-worn concept of the bitter, disabled character wanting to get his own back on the world for his disability, while the second, which follows directly on, features a corny villain called the Gadgeteer, and the first indication of Steel's guilt complex. Art-wise, the book has the ubiquitous mass-produced feel to it, due to the fact that it all looks so rushed.

File under bland. -Jan Garczynski

CONAN #87 (June)
"Demons At The Summit" (12 pages) by Thomas & DeZuniga, and "The Hyborian Age" (6 pages) by Thomas & Chan

Oh, dear...

Well, at least they tell you the lead story's reprinted--from Savage Sword #3, to be precise. It's not the fact that it's a reprint that bugs me, it's the fact that it's not really good enough to be seen at all, let alone regurgitated for a second performance. The story is about the most inconsequential, inane Conan story ever, and let's face it, there have been some turkeys! The artwork is patchy, page 6 panel 3 being about the best piece in it.

My point is this--if you have to reprint a story, reprint it because (1) it wasn't widely seen the first time around, and (2) it's worth showing, which shouldn't be a matter of aesthetics, but a matter of general recognition by fandom at large.

The back-up 6-pager is a trimming of the serialised Thomas/Simonson "Hyborian Age" from SSoC, and so suffers greatly, though Chan's art is, for the most part, quite enjoyable. -Jim Pyman

MAGUS #1
25p for 20 A4 pages from Phil Greenaway.

The long-awaited first issue of Magus; I'm glad to say it was well worth the wait --the colour cover alone would have been worth the money, in fact if you pulled almost any one page out of this fanzine you'd probably get your 25 pence worth, especially if you picked on pages 15 and 16, a K. Williams article entitled "Living in an Unstable Universe". The main points come into the class of "Why didn't I think of that?" Other than that, the contents range from very good--the Paul Jay strip and Maureen James--to fair, to pointless --the Paul Jay questionnaire & the poems.

A very promising start, on the whole. Phil promises that he'll see us in 75 days so the second issue should be out very soon; buy them both. And when you send off why not ask about a place in PAPA (Phil's APA)--it is worth joining to see the zines of Emlock, Maureen James, K. Williams, or even... -Jonathan Rogers

GHOST RIDER #30 (June)
"The Mage And The Monster" by Roger McKenzie, Don Perlin & Jim Mooney

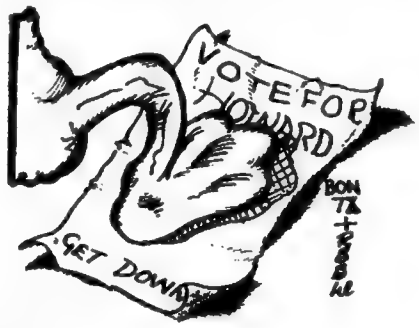
Best Marvel cover of the month so far, by Chan, and the story's not too bad either. It's the second part of a (presumably) 3-part Doctor Strange team-up/battle, with Dormammu as the catalyst.

Lately, GR has gradually turned back into the horror magazine it was always meant to be, and it's better for it. Look at pages 10 & 11 and you'll know what I mean. Don Perlin has improved no end since WEREWOLF BY NIGHT and, with Mooney inking, his pencils look even better, although his Clea leaves a little to be desired, and Dormammu looked a little too much like a red and yellow pumpkin. Roger McKenzie is handling this book, and DAREDEVIL, surprisingly well, and he may just get both books back up where they belong--at the top, and published monthly.

I don't know where to put this story in terms of Doc's chronology, but I'll find somewhere. And I'm looking forward to the next issue of GR again. -Martin S. Forrest

ASTRAL COMICS #1 starring ASTRON
Tom Sciacca Publications; $1.25

With staff like Tom, Rich Buckler, Tex Blaisdell and John Workman, this looks at first glance like Star*Reach, and that's no mean feat. Storywise, a touch of the STARLORD by WARLOCK out of CAPTAIN MARVEL ...until you realise that Tom thought up Astron years ago. The main story, by Tom himself, aided by Rich et al, is a good sci-fi tale, with dashes of the origin of Astron. Some of the other parts of the book are typical underground or ground level pieces, not too much to my taste, but there are lots of nice Astron pin-up pages by Grell, Simonson & Buckler; overall, very good value. -Steven L. Winetrobe




SUPERBOY AND THE LSH #240 (June)
"The Man Who Manacled the Legion" by Levitz, Harris, Chaykin & Wiacek (22 pages); "Dawnstar Rising" by Levitz, Kupperberg, Sherman & McLeod (12pp)

Let me say, first of all, that I have never really liked the Legion, possibly because the first stories I read featuring them were those in Adventure around 1966, not noted for their depth of characterization -- and these stories do nothing really to aid me liking them. The lead story is basically watered-down Chaykin, like STAR WARS, with him only doing layouts, and the Chaykin touch only really comes out in a couple of instances. I haven't really got any complaints about the art, though, and the story's not that bad; it's just your average superheroics in another century, and the extra pages just don't do anything, they just make the story longer and that much more boring. The plot, by the way, is a battle with a guy called Grimbor ("the greatest chainsman in the Universe", no less!), whose chief characteristic is a passing resemblance to Reed Richards and Chaykin's aging Nick Fury.

The supporting feature is a tale of the Legion Academy, with a title very similar to X-MEN #99. Anyway, the story is this: Legion trainee considers herself superior, remains aloof to fellow recruits--is saved by them from great danger/certain death--is shown the value of teamwork -- becomes reformed character. It is really quite a feat to cram so many clichés into twelve pages, considering so much time is spent fighting a giant robot and a couple of Disneyland monsters. We must be grateful, I suppose, that we didn't get: young hopeful dreams of joining Legion to avenge/emulate mother/father -- applies to join, is rejected because of age/height/bad breath--proves he has the requirements by defeating alien monster/mad dictator--is accepted into Academy. Perhaps they didn't have room for that. The art, incidentally, is quite nice, but it cannot distract much attention from the banality of the script. -Simon Booth

MACHINE MAN #3 (June)
"Ten-For, the Mean Machine"
by Jack Kirby & Mike Royer

Pure Kirby in this issue, as Machine Man bekomes kaught in some more kosmic kapers dreamt up by the King.

Unlike the Eternals, which suffered from space (no pun!) limitations, and Captain America, whose carefully-developed personality Kirby ignored, Machine Man, as an original creation involved in stories of "non-epic" proportions, works well. At least it's entertaining. -Adrian R. Last

LOOK-IN 1978 #16 (April 15th) 10p
Independant Television Publications Ltd

The British comics scene is starting to improve finally, with titles such as 2000 AD, House of Hammer, Starburst, and...the revamped Look-In. I've recently started buying this magazine, after discovering the increased amount of top class SF related strips that appear within its pages. Apart from the usual pop/sport articles and news, Gerry Anderson column and, in this issue, article on "Close Encounters", there are two humour strips, "The Benny Hill Page" and "Doctor On The Go", and four extremely interesting strips:

"The Six Million Dollar Man" has Steve Austin blowing up a Tirinian missile base; the story is adequate, but Martin Asbury's art is the highpoint of the strip. He shows a flair for detail, and has an original approach to his illustrating. The colouring is superb, enhancing the drawings and giving the strip a most pleasing look.

The recently introduced "Logan's Run" strip, whilst lacking colour, is equally good, as it has a stronger storyline. This issue concerns itself with Logan and Jessica's experiences in an underground city where they are worshipped as gods by the inhabitants. The characters in this strip remain faithful in appearance to the TV actors, and this I found to be especially pleasing.

"The Bionic Woman", unbelievable as it may seem, outclasses all of the other strips in the mag -- purely because my favourite British artist, John Bolton, is responsible for the rendering of Jaime Sommers (in colour!). He does his job beautifully. In this episode, Jaime fights several martial arts experts in order to save an American diplomat.

Kudos goes to M. Noble for producing a satisfactory "Man From Atlantis" tale. Mark Harris encounters a gigantic mutated deep-sea fish--and he is resolved to find out the reason for its present appearance.

Everything considered, I would heartily recommend 'Look-In' to any comic fan...I only wish that 2000 AD could be published in a similar format. Rumour has it, however, that IPC are planning just that for a similar SF comic. Praise be to Star Wars for renewing interest in anything that is SF orientated! -Phillip Greenaway

HULK #224 (June)
"Follow the Leader" by Roger Stern, Sal Buscema & Joe Rubinstein

After Len Wein's meanderings, this book seems to have finally found a direction. Sal Buscema seems to be learning how to draw again, the high points being pages 7 & 22. Rubinstein gives the book an Adams-ish quality, and Stern's plot, although very simple, is well told.

Get it! It's good, clean fun. -Jim Pyman

FANTASY ADVERTISER ≠64 (undated)
45p from Colin Campbell.

Four issues for £1.50

Another interesting issue from Colin, who continues to give us the same quality that Dez Skinn used to. Among this issue's choice items are a Don McGregor article on his "Dragonflame" book, transcribed tapes of the Chicago Comicon featuring words by Al Milgrom, Paul Kupperberg, Martin Pasko, Paul Levitz and others, another episode of "Swordspell" by Alan Booth & Angus McKie, Battlefield, and loads of advertisements from people buying and selling specialist publications, comics & copies of Penthou--oops, sorry, wrong fanzine. -J. Garczynski

NOVA ≠20 (July)
"At Last...The Inner Circle" by Wolfman, Infantino & Hunt

For once, a cover which has something to do with the inside. This ish appears to herald a new Wolfman epic, which should rocket Nova back into fan popularity--and followers of Sherlock Holmes will also be interested in Bobby's new invention! Art-wise, the first Carmine issue that looks like the real Infantino, thanks to Dave Hunt's unobtrusive inking.

Nova comes of age with the next issue. It's a pleasant title -- nothing special, certainly not as momentous as the early Spideys it was meant to emulate, but it's a better use of valuable paper than the Kirby klassics! -Steven L. Winetrobe

MISTY (15th & 22nd April) 8p

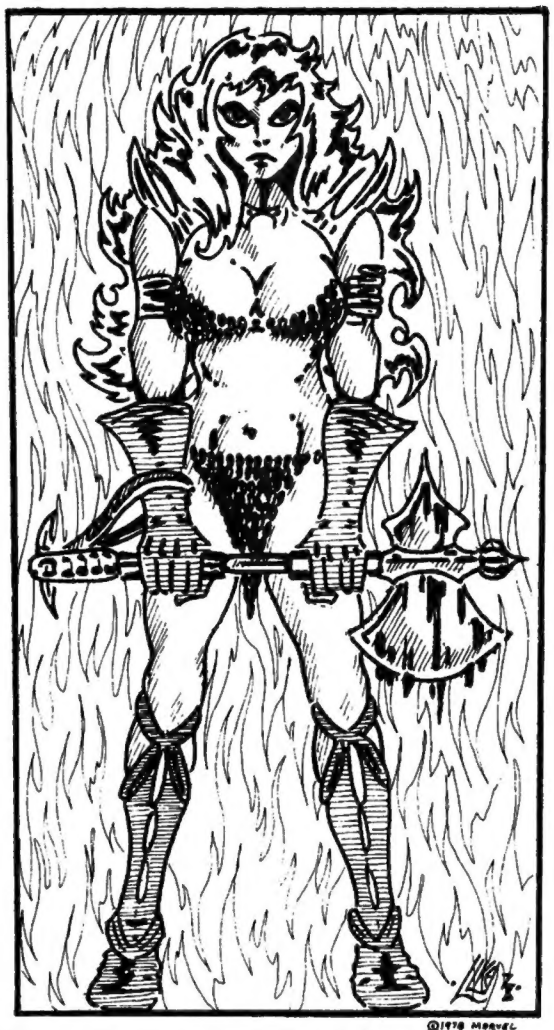
On show we have the last two instalments of "The Cult of the Cat", featuring a heroine who is convinced she is changing into a cat (makes a change from lycanthropy) and the Cult of Bast (Bubastis, the Egyptian cat goddess), two episodes of "Paint It Black" concerning a girl who paints pictures in the style of a Victorian artist using water colours she found in a deserted mansion, "The Day of the Dragon" featuring a magic mirror (these seem to be easier to come by than the non-magic variety) which projects scenes of the life of the daughter of a retired government official living in Shantung Province 1000 years ago (that's what it says here), "The Sentinels" concerning a dimensional pathway to an Earth where Germany won World War II, which is considerably better than it sounds, and "Moonchild, the Girl Who Has the Power" of telekinesis, who naturally has a conspiracy against her among her schoolmates. Whew! That only covers the serials. The earlier issue also has "The Guardian Lynxes", a 4-page tale about an ancient tomb in Crete, and "Alvado's Portrait", set in Victorian times, and featuring an artist who uses magic paints (look, that must be where the "Paint it Black" paints came from); the second issue unfortunately has a butterfly collector cover story, need I say more? Besides, all butterfly collector tales were rendered obsolete by the one in PLOP ≠17. Also on view is a 4-page tale of a girl accused of witchcraft.

At least 50% of each issue is eminently readable, and well worth two-thirds of the price of a copy of HUMAN FLY. Fellas, if you're too embarrassed to buy a copy borrow your sister's--no boarding schools, Victorian orphans or ballet dancers here, Kathleen! -Robin A! Webster

# THE RED SONJA INTERVIEW

It seems like only yesterday that I was pushed into Emlock's patent time machine with the gently-phrased order: "Get an interview with Red Sonja, or don't come back!" At first I wasn't too happy about the assignment, but when I was told the second choice was Conan... I decided I'd be safer with Sonja. The centuries flew by, until the needle pointed to "Hyborian Age". After wandering around for a while, I tracked the lady in question down to a noisy tavern...

MJ Excuse me, are you Red Sonja?
RS That's what they call me, lass.
MJ Oh, good. I'd like to ask you a few questions. I'm from Bem Magazine.




RS Is that part of Stygia?
MJ No...
RS Didn't think you looked like a sorceress, but you can't be too careful these days. Especially with people who look like you. Well, girl? What do you want to ask me? Speak up!
MJ Er... Just a few things about your present life, for Emlock.
RS Wait a moment -- what is an "Emlock"? It sounds like some sort of demon!
MJ You've got it--I mean, no, Emlock is my chieftain. At least, I think that's how you'd put it.
RS Ah--I see. Very well, you may begin.
MJ Do you ever regret not taking up King Ghannif's offer to join his harem?
RS By the Tarim! You dare ask me that? I made a vow never to yield to any man, unless he has bested me on the field of battle. Does that satisfy you?
MJ Not really; to my way of thinking King Ghannif really did best you in a battle --a battle of wits. He out-smarted you with his offer of the most precious gift that he could bestow.
RS Take care, girl! Just remember what happened to him!
MJ Yes, quite. About this vow you made. I understand how you felt at the time, but don't you think you go a bit too far with it sometimes?
RS No.
MJ To rephrase the question--do you think it is correct to hit Conan with a rock, when he's trying to help you?
RS It was entirely for his own good. I didn't want his death on my hands.
MJ Because the bounty hunters were after you, that is?
RS No, because he was getting entirely too friendly -- in another moment I'd have had to run him through.
MJ How exactly, then, do you wish men to regard you?
RS All I want them to regard me as is an equal. I can handle a sword as well as, if not better than, they can -- I can out-fight, out-drink, and out-swear any of them!
MJ One point I would like to make--just what is your armour supposed to protect?
RS The lighter the armour, the faster you can move in battle. My armour also gives me another advantage; the men are so busy looking at what it does not protect, I can get the first blow in.
MJ I see--does that mean you couldn't get the better of them any other way?
RS Certainly not, you insolent child!
MJ To change the subject, what would be your reaction if Conan defeated you on the field of battle?
RS What do you speak of, girl?
MJ Your vow, Reddy -- I mean, Red Sonja.
RS I never think upon it--that arrogant male would never manage to defeat me.
MJ But if he, or any man, did...
RS I would not forget my vow--but, as I am a woman, no doubt I could find some way out. A head-ache, perhaps?
MJ Sonja, this is a personal question--but have you ever thought of settling down to marriage one day? You won't be young forever, after all...
RS Give my freedom up for a man? Never! You are beginning to annoy me, woman, as well as wasting good drinking time.
MJ Have you got something against other women, Sonja?
RS Only the fact that most of them can't do anything without a man.
MJ Well, I can think of one thing that we couldn't do without men, but since this is a family magazine...
RS I'd like to teach the women here that they can do as I have. Mitra! They've all been forced into their downtrodden lives by men, it's time they rose up!
MJ Women's Lib, we call it.
RS What are those strange words?
MJ They're words we use a lot where I come from. They mean that women are the equals of men.
RS Just where is this Bem place you come from, strangely garbed one?
MJ Actually, I come from the future -- a few thousand years ahead, in fact...
RS Tarim's blood! You are a sorceress! Get out NOW, or--

And so I left the tavern. My journey back to the Bem editorial offices was uneventful, but now Emlock's begun to ask why I've got this battle-axe embedded in my head... -MAUREEN JAMES

# MADE IN BRITAIN

This is the last time I will be doing a column under this title; "Made In Britain" has become too misleading, when European comics series such as Asterix have crept in, and, now that Al Matheson has got himself fired as underground correspondent due to his very poor attendance record, it's time for a less limiting title. And so we proudly announce "The Great Bem Name-That-Column Contest", with some sort of prize for the winner --probably a Bem subscription.

First, three comic albums I've picked up since last time; BIGGLES AND THE SARGASSO TRIANGLE by Björn Karlström, at 95p for 48 pages, is a sort of imitation Tintin, based of course on the W.E. Johns British aviator. It's curious that we get a British character in a translation of a Swedish strip -- but not much more than a curiosity, I found it rather tedious. I hope to investigate Tintin in time for my next column, based on Dean Smith's letter in Reaction--thanks, Dean! Different from the other album series is the "Haroun al Plassid" set by Goscinny & Tabary, in that each volume contains a number of short stories. The third in this series, THE WICKED WILES OF IZNOGOUD, has in its 52 pages (for 95p) "Kissmet", "Mesmereyesed", "The Occidental Philtre", "The Picnic", "The Time Machine", and "Chop and Change", all 8 pages each; the scene is Old Bagdad, with the well-named Grand Vizier, Iznogoud, plotting and scheming to get rid of the Caliph. Very enjoyable, very funny --though I sometimes wonder what the kids these books are aimed at by the publishers make of some of the subtleties! OMPA-PA AND THE PIRATES, at 85p for 32 pages, is not as good value; it does bring us vintage 1962 work by Goscinny & Uderzo, as the mighty Red Indian warrior Oopa-Pa, fresh from an uncredited cameo role in the Asterix film, voyages with his Redcoat friend across the high seas to England, though. Good fun, and good comic invention--the series is picking up momentum as it goes along very nicely.

A different sort of album, like the last two translated from the French but this time aimed at the buyers of Roger Dean's "Views" and so on, is LONE SLOANE/DELIRIUS by Druillet, 144 colour 8¼" x 10¾" pages for £3.95. It's two books in one -- "Lone Sloane" contains six 8-page adventures of the moody, mysterious cosmic wanderer of that name, while "Delirius" is a 68-page Lone Sloane adventure on a pleasure world. I found some of the earlier stories a bit hard to follow, but either the scripter, Lob, settled down, or I got on the correct wave-length, because "Delirius" struck me as excellent. And of course Druillet's art is magnificent -- not a word to be used at all lightly, but here it's deserved. The publisher is Dragon's Dream Ltd, combined with Heavy Metal for U.S.A. distribution.

On the underground front, Birmingham's ARZAK: The Arts Lab Press have issued 3 books recently. PAPER DOLL HEROINE has 16 A6 pages, mainly photo-collages, for 10p, by Suzy Varty. "Obscure" is the word I'd use to describe it. HEROINE ≠1, with 36 A4 pages for 45p, is much more interesting, I think; it's a comic by women (with token male contributor Borin van Loon), about women--for everyone. It's not a new 4-page strip by US cartoonist Trina Robbins. If you've never tried an underground comic, I'd suggest something less complex, like the (Fabulous Furry) Freak Brothers, but if you do appreciate u/gs, this belongs in your collection--as does STREET COMIX ≠5, with in its 40 pages (for 45p) Hunt Emerson, Bem contributors Luke Rainford and Mike Matthews, Chris Welch, and more. To order by mail, add 15p p/p per item and make cheques payable to The Arts Lab Press, at 11, Gosta Green, Birmingham B4 7ER. Street Comix is Britain's best u/g anthology title; recommended.

STARBURST seems to have ended its tenuous link with comics, as of ≠3; (Hammer's) HOUSE OF HORROR continues to feature around 15 pages of strip per issue, though, and ≠20 has a dramatic cover by Bill Phillips for the adaptation of the Captain Kronos film; Steve Moore had the task of turning a full-length movie into a 12-page script, drawn by Steve "Thong" Parkhouse, who in turn scripted the 3-page "Van Helsing's Terror Tale", drawn by Patrick Wright. Upcoming strips include "Revenge of Frankenstein" by Chris Wicking & Paul Neary, "Enemy From Space", "Brides of Dracula", "Dr Jeckyll & Sister Hyde", and, from the team of Doug Moench, John Bolton & Pat Wright, "The Devil Rides Out". Now that should be worth waiting for, methinx!

LOOK-IN and TARGET are dealt with in the Review Section, I gather; TV COMIC is quite interesting these days, in the same format as Target, with Dr Who, Lucan, and a (magic) skateboard adventure strip, but like Target, the colouring's very crude. And reprinting a Gold Key Star Trek comic two pages at a time is a strange trick!

LION HOLIDAY SPECIAL has 64 pages of the usual mixture for 35p -- nothing special, just "Trelawny of the Guards", "The Clancy Brothers", "Steel Commando", and funnies. It's surprising IPC still bother to use the name of a defunct comic in this way; but to the parents who do the buying, the name may still bring back memories.

If D.C. Thomson won't provide opposition for 2000 AD, IPC themselves will--so here comes STAR LORD, at 12p per week. I must say it's promising; the four series in the first issue are "Planet of the Damned" by R.E. Wright & Lalia, "Timequake" by Jack Adrian & Ian Kennedy, "Strontium Dog" by T.B. Grover & Ezquerra, and "Ro-Busters" by Pat Mills & Pino, with "Mind Wars" due to start in ≠2. There's some nice stuff here, in 32 slick pages, 8 in colour; the "Strontium Dog" strip would fit into HEAVY METAL very easily, I'd say. So, seek out copies; this could well be the best British comic -- ever!

-RUAN LANIHORNE

## THE COMIC COMIC COLUMN

It's sad to hear that people don't care much for the funny papers. I find them very enjoyable, and, at 9p or less, they don't leave a hole in your pocket.

IPC have made another "team-up"; KRAZY has now been incorporated into WHIZZER & CHIPS, also 8p. The new look is okay, but they've missed out a lot of the characters from Krazy -- a pity.

PLUG, one of the newer comic papers, has glossy, colourful pages, but the actual content is poor. Original ideas are few and far between, and the characters inside Plug are very poor--"Ava Banana" has the worst artist on it I've ever seen. There are a few good ideas, though: "Digby", "Lumpy Gibbon", and "Eebagoom", which is based around the Roman invasion of Britain --it's well drawn, and well written. At 9p this is one of D.C. Thomson's costlier comics; the printing is very good, but if I was them I'd put more effort into the strips inside.

BEEZER AND CRACKER is another D.C. Thomson comic; with its large page size it's more like a newspaper in format. It's only 7p for 16 large pages, 8 in colour, and the art on all the strips is very good. My favourite strip is "The Numskulls", a comical look into an old man's head, while "The Badd Lads" is good too. While the "Cracker" part of the comic is only four pages, they are split in half, with twice as much fitted in. "Billy the Kid" is much like Denis the Menace, and even has a dog --I wonder what Gnasher would say to that?

The art in the D.C. Thomson comics is better, on average, than IPC's, except for IPC stalwarts R.T. Nixon, Ian Knox, and Frank McDiarmid; but one thing I'd like to see both companies doing is the publishing of artist and writer credits, as in 2000 AD.

-JOE W. MATTHEWS

# NEWS AT BEM

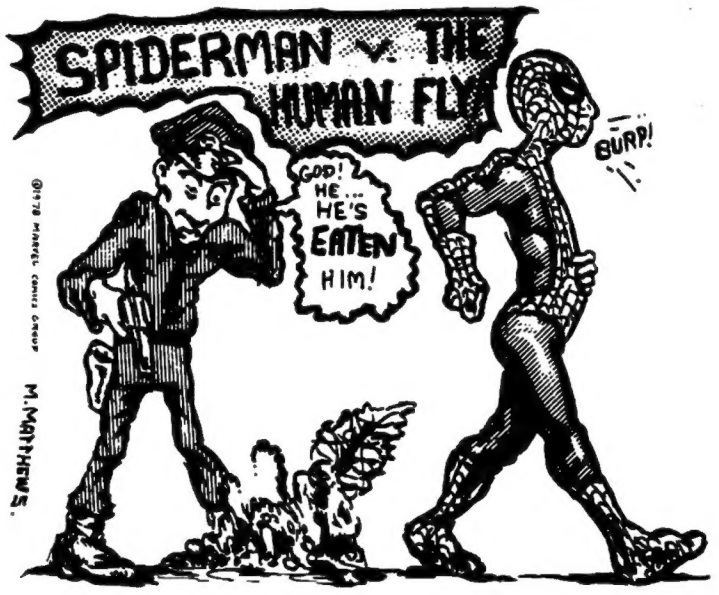
The idea of making Bem four pages longer seems to have met a favourable response; so, get ready to pay 25p in shops or marts for Bem-20, which is due out in time for Comicon 78. The Bem subscription rate is changing too, as you might expect -- from July 1st it will be £1.50 for five issues by post. Until then, it's still six issues for £1.50, so this is an excellent time to subscribe to Bem, and get it delivered to your door at no extra charge. So, subscribe (or extend your Bem subscription, if you have already got one) -- a £1.50 cheque or postal order, payable to M. Lock, plus your name and address, is all we need. And you get Fantasy Trader as well, which is more than just Bem's ad supplement now!

Also well-received was the option given to Bem contributors (artists, reviewers, letter writers...) of having a comic-size cover repro instead of a complimentary copy of Bem; if you are hoping to be in Bem-19, just enclose a 9p stamp, and also indicate the sort of repro you'd prefer. If you don't do this, you'll automatically get a copy of the Bem you appear in, or an extension to your Bem subscription.

Well, another two months, another issue of Bem. For a change of pace, Chris Ash is hard at work on a new special project that should appear in Bem soon -- but more next time on that. If you like Captain Frog--well, you ain't seen nothing yet! In the short term, the extra pages should allow Fan-Things, Reaction and Ruan's column to expand, and give more flexibility to Bem. So, let's see how it goes, shall we? -ML

# KATHOLICITY

Alas, I was accurséd from my birth.
  The day I first arrived--on Marvel-Earth
Was the same day the Invaders came to town
  Red Skull-controlled, they came and tore it down,
Then fought a battle over all the region
  With some new group, or rather some new Legion.
The sounds that first came to my baby ears
  Were whooshes, zaps and crashes, sundry jeers,
The noise of falling buildings -- sounds of strife
  That followed me (oh woe) for all my life.
I got through school in reasonable peace
  (Ah, how was I to know how soon 'twould cease?)
And left, and opened up a clothing store
  Round about issue 1, Fantastic Four.
And the first customer that fate did bring
  Was an unfittable and irate Thing
Who wrecked the joint. With compensation cash
  I thought at farming I would have a bash--
At Rutland, Vermont then a farm I bought
  And a worse place to go I couldn't have got.
For soon I was to find that every year
  Some bunch of super-heroes would appear
And always, always, to my misery
  Their battles all would somehow damage me.
Thor caused a thunderstorm, which caused a flood
  And Dracula drained my best milk-cow's blood.
As it reached Hallowe'en each year I trembled;
  Daredevil broke my windows. The Assembled
Avengers knocked my barn down, and the bulk
  Of my new crops were trampled by the Hulk.
'Twas Iron Man's far-famed repulsor ray
  That accidentally tore my roof away.
The Dread Dormammu, twixt one dusk and dawn
  Appeared on Earth--in fact, on my front lawn;
And then an ill-aimed spell from Dr Strange
  As he fought Dorm my face did rearrange
For several months, and women are odd creatures
  And do not much love men with warthog's features.
And as I fled the scene (why was I born?)
  Directly overhead flew Aragorn--
And do you think with pigeons you've got trouble?
  So my bad luck did double and redouble.
I left the farm, for my insurance man
  Had just disowned me with a lifelong ban,
And moved again, for peace and quiet a questor
  To the so-called quiet suburb of Westchester
And got a place beside a private school.
  (Alack for me, the unsuspecting fool)
A gang of youthful weirdos lived next door
  With a bald, crippled gent, and what is more
Still weirder were the folks who came to call
  On them, and finished up flung through my wall.
I left again, now in despair, and so, sir
  Went to New York, where I became a grocer.
I thought if I lay low I might be missed--
  It was not so. (Oh why do I exist?)
Going for a stroll, my spirits at the ebb
  Alas, I intercepted Spidey's web.
"So you're stuck fast" he said, "No need to worry
  "It wears off in twelve hours--you're in no hurry"
And as he shot his web and swung away
  I shouted "I agree with Jonah J!
"I like him well!" (My name is Jonah too.
  You never would have guessed that fact, would you?)
Thereafter--but for several kung-fu dramas
  Involving men in red or green pyjamas
And one in white long-johns, beneath my sill--
  All was serene for one whole week, until
I woke one morning to a sonic boom,
  And found the Inhumans gathered in my room.
It seemed their dog had brought them there in error
  So, giving me some gold to soothe my terror
They left. They left, but bloody Lockjaw stayed
  And ate my stock up. So I fled dismayed.
I got on the first Greyhound bus that came,
  And it took me to Cleveland, of whose fame
You have to understand I'd never heard--
  Especially about a certain bird.
I got there, and the night was black as ink
  And no-one would take gold for food and drink.
They didn't believe it was gold. No cash left
  Had I, and so I roamed, of food bereft
Until I saw--it seemed like such good luck--
  Waddling along the street, this huge great duck.
"It's dressed" I thought "It must be someone's pet"
  But I was starving, and here food I'd met!
I pounced, one "Waughhh!" and--though I do not boast
  Of that 'fowl' deed--he made a lovely roast.
How could I know that, eating to survive,
  I'd just made Marvel's profits take a dive?
And so, pursued by maniacal Lee
  And screaming Gerber, swiftly must I flee.
Refuge I found in a mad scientist's retreat
  (There's one in Marveldom on every street)
I gave to him some gold to save my skin,
  And this great huge machine he threw me in.
His tri-dimensional-transporter, mark five
  Soon sent me to (oh why am I alive?)
Earth-One. My stay there was five minutes old
  When I was frozen stiff by Captain Cold,




Thawed out by Heatwave, whisked off by the Flash,
  Who threw me casually upon some trash.
A Gerry Conway time-warp then I hit
  Enemy Ace I met, and his wolf bit
My leg. A future time I reached, afraid,
  Where scores of super-heroes romped and played.
When I saw them, so loud my screams did pierce,
  They sent me back in time to save their ears.
I reached Metropolis, and caught my death
  Of cold from gusts of someone's super-breath.
I went to Gotham City in the night,
  Bumped into Batman, nearly died of fright.
Went to Coast City, where (why me, God, why?)
  Green Lantern fought a battle in the sky
With red Sinestro. Some stray energy
  Blasted my car, and nearly blasted me.
Trembling with fear, for my escape was narrow,
  I fled off to Star City, where Green Arrow
Missed his shot's mark, for once in his career--
  Guess who he neatly punctured in the rear?
And as I limped away (alas, alack)
  He rudely yelled, "Hey, bring my arrow back!"
I'd had enough. Finito. I was beat.
  I threw myself down at the Flash's feet
(He kicked me by mistake) and begged his aid;
  And so by Cosmic Treadmill he conveyed
Me to the super-hero-less Earth Prime,
  And I should be quite happy now. But I'm
Not really so, alas, for sad to say
  This world of yours seems somehow rather...grey.

To Mr K.W., the onlie begetter of the article in Another Publication which inspired this epic, the author renders due acknowledgement. -KATHLEEN GLANCY

# TALE-ENDERS

DEFENDERS ≠60 concludes the three-part "Xenogenesis" tale with "The Revenge of Vera Gemini" by Dave Kraft, Ed Hannigan & Dan Green. As usual when Devil Slayer is involved, there are lots of references to the Blue Oyster Cult, but they don't get in the way of the story. This book lives up to its reputation as one of Marvel's best titles -- mainly because Kraft, like Gerber and Englehart before him, is not afraid of trying something different.

WHAT IF has a more varied history; some stories have been good, some poor, and a few don't belong in such a title at all. "What If the Avengers had been formed during the 1950's?" asks Iron Man, backed up by Roy Thomas, Don Glut, Al Kupperberg & Bill Black -- I wonder if the Englehart "Origin of the Justice League--Minus One" from JLA ≠144 gave them the idea? It's not a bad story, and the art's adequate, but I wish it had been put in a different comic, so that we could accept it as part of the main-line history of the Marvel Universe; it's nice to see Jimmy Woo, the Yellow Claw, Marvel Boy, Venus, Jann of the Jungle, Namora, and even the 3-D Man in action again, anyway.

As Jolly Jack says in DEVIL DINOSAUR ≠3, "Believability is the key word"--and that is what the title lacks. I wonder how much longer it will last? That's a question we don't have to ask about MAN FROM ATLANTIS ≠5; I doubt if it would be lasting up to ≠7 if Bill Mantlo, Frank Robbins & Frank Springer hadn't just begun a 3-parter. I gather the TV show may be returning; if it does, why not try a book called NAMOR, KING OF ATLANTIS or something?

Since I've got the album on now, what better time to mention STAR WARS? Issue 12 is the second to come from the talented team of Goodwin, Infantino & Austin--it's certainly a relief to see the book rescued from Thomas & Chaykin, who seemed to have lost all interest when the film adaptation was finished. Besides the usual 17 pages of story, entitled "Doomworld" (I wonder how much Darth Vader owes to Victor von Doom...?), there are eight pages of house ads for 32 other Marvel comics. Will Star Wars fans be tempted to become Marvelites by such subtle blandishments?

The June MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE (≠40), with Black Panther as guest, features a talent of Benjy's seldom spotlighted -- he cooks a mean, if messy, pizza! But, in a nice, leisurely way, a plot does appear, from Roger Slifer & Tom DeFalco; it all looks like a job next month for Brother Voodoo! The art's by Ron Wilson & Pablo Marcos.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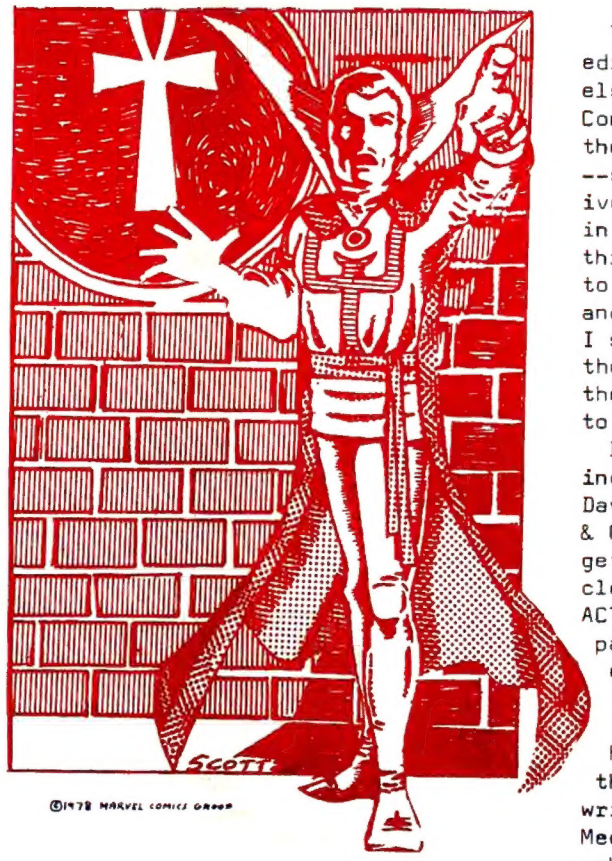


HOWARD THE DUCK ≠25 features the buying of a new jacket for the famous fowl in "seville ripe olive green", as he, Winda, and Paul move into high society--but that is before the arrival of the Ringmaster and his Circus of Crime! If you like the works of Gerber, Colan & Janson, you'll need no further details--except that this tale takes place before this Bem's poem by Kathleen Glancy, which has the title "The Lament of Mr J. Innocent Bystander" -- but you try to get Superswipe to make a logo that long!

Moving on to DC, SECRETS OF HAUNTED HOUSE SPECIAL (DC SPECIAL SERIES ≠12) has a Starlin cover, with interior artists including Alcazar & Sutton, with Russ Heath as inker on the splash page; Pat Broderick draws one of the stories in WITCHING HOUR 81, which makes a change from Captain Mar-Vell.

WEIRD WESTERN ≠46 is the second issue to feature Bat Lash as Scalphunter's guest, in "The Savage Streets" by Gerry Conway, Dick Ayers & George Evans. I must admit it's my first meeting with the smooth-talking Mr Lash; I'm going to look out Showcase ≠76 and the seven issues from my shelves and read 'em now. Just as long as I don't get carried away and start reading some other titles I have collected but not read! Challengers, "The New Blackhawk Era", Rip Hunter -- I only read the Sea Devils to do an article on them, one I've never actually written. Anyway, WWT 46 I liked.

FIRESTORM ≠3 continues on its Nova-ish, Rick Jones-ish way with "Kiss Not The Lips of Killer Frost" by Conway, Milgrom and McLeod. It's enjoyable, interesting, and fast-moving--there's no law that says it has to be original as well, is there?

This is the point where I slip in some editorial remarks I didn't have room for elsewhere. First, Richard Burton and Mike Conroy have kindly provided 25 copies of the voting form for their "Eagle Awards" --since they've made it more representative this year by putting five candidates in each category instead of last year's three, I've run off enough extra copies to send a form to all Bem subscribers--and, if you send them back to me, before I send them on to Richard I'll work out the results for Bem readers, and publish them next time--it should be interesting to compare 'em with the final results.

BATMAN ≠300 was a disappointment--some ingenious science fiction gimmicks from David V. Reed, and nice art from Simonson & Giordano, but the spirit of the Batman gets lost -- and in the end it's not even clear if it is "The Last Batman Story." ACTION ≠484, besides being good value (22 pages for 35 cents) is a better story; to celebrate forty years of Superman, Cary Bates, Curt Swan & Joe Giella present "Superman Takes A Wife". One "Colonel Future" reminds us of Captain Future, the pulp hero creation of long-time Supes writer Edmond Hamilton, and the flying Mechanical Marauders are very similar to robots the Man of Steel fought in one of the golden age cartoons that get shown at Comicons--and the story captures the mood of the old Earth-2 stories. Yes, it's not our TV anchorman, Edge-heckled Clark Kent in this story; instead, he's working for editor George Taylor of the Daily Star. Action, drama, and Lois Lane as she always was--snooping, suspicious, yet courageous and responsible -- this one's got it all! The "Mr and Mrs Superman" spin-off series should be good.

I must apologise to letter-writers whose guided missives don't see print this time; as ace letter-answer man Mike Cruden was unfortunately taken ill, quite a lot of letters were held up until almost all the lettercol had to be typed up. So, it just shows that the early letters are likeliest to see print--people who cheerfully send LoCs in a month after Bem comes out aren't likely to get printed anyway, though your views are still very valuable to us -- not all of Bem can be put together at the same time, and it's always Reaction I start on when getting a new issue together.

CLAW ≠11 concludes the barbarian's quest for King Occulas; David Michelinie wraps it up well, while Keith Giffen (inked by John Celardo) is slightly more disciplined than on the Challs of late. However, the way Giffen's style is going, comics won't be able to accomodate him much longer.

Bem-20 will not contain a Review Section --but will have "Tale-Enders". And that will be the final instalment of this column; that's life, I guess! -MARTIN LOCK